THE Nation.

TOUGH LOVE FOR ISRAEL
Henry Siegman

OBAMA AND CLASS
Gary Younge

WRIGHT'S CHURCH—AND OURS
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Letters

Fire the Fed

Hercules, Calif.
"In this crisis, the Federal Reserve is an untrustworthy agent for the public interest. Its…bias is to defend the club members and cover up its own errors" ["The Gentlemen's Bailout," April 7]. *The Nation* hits the nail on the head. Now take the next step. Call for a public central bank. A bank that will not charge us interest on our own money. A bank that will honor its fiduciary duty to the public. A bank that will truly be independent of the interests it regulates.

The privately owned Federal Reserve has throughout its ninety-five-year history promoted the interests of its members over the good of the country. In the last decades we saw bubble after bubble, panic after panic, and yet the mantra was always "free markets," "less regulation," "more financial innovation." And for what? The profits of its member banks.

This crisis is far from over, and much bigger catastrophes loom. In the meantime the public is subsidizing the very interests that caused the disaster: tens of trillions of dollars of credit default swaps and hundreds of trillions in derivatives in a market that is not regulated and has no financial standards for counterparties and no legal framework for determinations. Our entire GDP is only about $14 trillion. The loss of even a small percentage of these markets will bankrupt the country. The failure of the Federal Reserve to regulate these behemoth markets is reason enough to give it the boot. We need a public central bank.
Michael McKinlay

The New Deal Was a Good Deal

Olympia, Wash.
Your special issue on the New Deal [April 7] brought back many memories. My parents voted for Hoover in 1932. My father, a poor but proud farmer, survivor of the Dust Bowl and Depression, refused to work for the WPA. (Most of our neighbors did. They drove late-model Model A's; we drove a flivver and nearly starved.) Republicans called the savior of the poor, the WPA, We Piddle Around. A typical Republican joke was: "5,000 years ago, Moses said, 'Load up your camels and asses, we're going to the Promised Land.' Roosevelt says, 'Sit on your asses, light up a Camel—this *is* the Promised Land!'" But we always listened to FDR's fireside chats on our battery-powered radio. When I first voted, for Truman in 1948, my father, who had become wiser, admitted he'd been wrong to vote against Democrats all those years.
Wesley M. Wilson

New Haven, Conn.
I could not agree more that we need a new New Deal. But I would not necessarily argue that the Democratic candidates should promise one before the election. You will recall that during his campaign against Hoover, FDR promised to balance the federal budget!
Rob Forbes

Sun City Center, Fla.
I am old enough to remember how FDR brought amazing things forth out of chaos and despair. I was thinking along those lines when Barack Obama spoke so passionately about his community work and how to put young energy into constructive projects. I feel Obama offers us leadership for the future. I hope it happens, as I want to have a few final years of living in a more hopeful and healthy country. Near my home is a park with a beautiful wooden suspension bridge over a river, built by the CCC. It reminds me of what can be accomplished with true leadership.
Pearl Volkov

Geneva, Switzerland
I'm not old enough to remember FDR, but I was raised by people who did. All were grateful. I had an uncle whose first job after high school in Manhattan was with the CCC down South. I learned to love books in a WPA building, the Brooklyn Public Library at Grand Army Plaza—a beauty (except for the lobby, desecrated in the Nixonian early '70s). The FDR Administration made a better life possible for

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Olympic Flame Out

Although it has been embroidered with the ersatz regalia of antiquity, the Olympic torch relay does not, in fact, date back to the ancient Greeks or even to Pierre de Coubertin, the organizer of the first modern games, in 1896. It was the brainchild of Carl Diem, who spearheaded the 1936 Berlin Olympics under the approving gaze of Josef Goebbels and Adolf Hitler. Designed by Krupp—the German munitions company whose owners were indicted for crimes against humanity at Nuremberg—the torch was carried into the Olympiastadion by the elegant and very Aryan 1,500-meter runner Fritz Schilgen in front of a phalanx of swastikas and the cameras of Leni Riefenstahl, who documented the whole affair in her paean to the Nazi physique and spirit, *Olympia*.

EDITORIAL

As international protests shadow the Olympic flame on its Journey of Harmony from Athens to Beijing, it's important to bear these ignoble roots in mind, not because of any meaningful parallels between the Third Reich and the regime in China but as a reminder that the torch relay and indeed the Olympics are inherently political events—provisioned by big business, broadcast by the propagandists of yesteryear and the corporate media of today and hosted and contested by nation-states seeking glory beyond sport. An understanding of the Olympics as such ought to quell any outcry from Chinese and International Olympic Committee (IOC) officials who grouse that demonstrators are improperly politicizing the games. If China, with the support of the IOC, plans to use Beijing 2008 as an advertisement for Chinese nationalism and market "socialism with Chinese characteristics," it can hardly complain when protests raised by or on behalf of Tibetan and Uighur separatists; the victims of genocide in Darfur and repression in Burma; Chinese unionists, farmers, environmentalists, AIDS activists and other internal dissidents flip the script and borrow a bit of the spotlight for their respective causes.

But the history of Olympic politics ought also to serve as a cautionary note to campaigners. The boycotts of the 1980 Moscow and 1984 Los Angeles Olympics were little more than cold war theater at the expense of athletes' fortunes, and given the unpopularity of a repeat fiasco—never mind the substantial investments corporations have already made in the games—few are calling for a total boycott. Instead the compromise seems to have become a "mini-boycott" in which world leaders decline to attend the opening ceremonies. Germany's Angela Merkel and Britain's Gordon Brown have indicated that they will play along; Hillary Clinton has called on George W. Bush to do the same, and France's Nicolas Sarkozy is mulling it over. The problem with this petite insurrection is that it will likely prove a mere irritation to Chinese leaders, who are inclined, at best, to make tiny and temporary gestures of reform in response. As a bit of moral pageantry—in which Bush hardly has the moral authority to participate—it allows elites to make a symbolic stand while gorging themselves on the Olympian spectacle. Where is the space for real dissent—by workers, by athletes, by movements—in all this?

A more enduring if more arduous path to improving human rights would sidestep the nationalism implicit in any Olympics boycott. It begins by creating leverage on China through pressing the transnational corporations that exploit cheap Chinese labor and rely on foreign direct investment from China to keep their profits flowing. The sports extravaganza in Beijing in August can provide the occasion to publicize this campaign, but its targets must also include the boardrooms of Western corporations and the ministerials of the WTO.

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NEWS & ANALYSIS

Nicholas von Hoffman: Bitter? You should be!

John Nichols: The Pope and the President

Cora Currier: The student (protest) Olympics

Ari Melber: Hillary's hypocrisy

NATION POLL

Will Obama's "bitter" remarks hurt him in Pennsylvania?

RADIO NATION

Laura Flanders talks with Eric Alterman

AROUND THE NATION

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KBR's Rape Problem

As news broke of the rape of yet another US military contractor employee in Iraq [see "Another KBR Rape Case" at thenation.com], the Senate Foreign Relations Committee convened a hearing April 9 to demand that the Justice Department explain why it has failed to prosecute a single sexual assault case in the theater since the Iraq War began.

COMMENT

"American women working in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to be sexually assaulted while their assailants go free," said Senator Bill Nelson, who called the hearing. Because squabbles about who has jurisdiction in these cases have proliferated, Nelson arranged to have representatives from the Defense, State and Justice departments sit down together in front of him. They were forced to listen while the latest victims testified.

Dawn Leamon, who worked for a subsidiary of KBR and had told her story to *The Nation* a week before, described—with her back to the packed room and her voice (mostly) steady—being sodomized and forced to have oral sex with a KBR colleague and a Special Forces soldier two months earlier. When she reported the incident to KBR supervisors, she met a series of obstacles, she said. "They would tell me to stay quiet about it or try to make it seem as if I brought it on myself or lied about it."

Another woman, Mary Beth Kineston, who worked as a commercial trucker for KBR in Iraq, testified that she had been raped in the cab of her truck by a KBR subcontractor employee at night while waiting in line to fill her water tanker truck. She immediately reported the incident to her supervisors; no one did a rape kit test, referred her for medical treatment or even offered to escort her back through the dark to her quarters that night.

Also at the hearing was Jamie Leigh Jones, whose story made the news in December, when she alleged that her 2005 gang rape by Halliburton/KBR co-workers in Iraq was being covered up by the company and the government. Jones, who has formed a nonprofit to support the many other women with similar experiences, says forty employees of US contractors have contacted her with stories of sexual assault or sexual harassment—and accounts of how Halliburton, KBR and the Cayman Island–based Service Employees International Inc. (SEII), a KBR shell company, either failed to help them or outright obstructed them.

As the number of women coming forward rises, Congress has begun to question why these crimes are not being prosecuted. In fact, there are several laws on the books that would allow these cases to proceed: the problem is not a lack of legal tools but a lack of will. "There is no rational explanation for this," says Scott Horton, a lecturer at Columbia Law School who specializes in the law of armed conflict. Prosecutorial jurisdiction for crimes like the alleged rapes of Jones and Leamon is easily established under the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act and the Patriot Act's special maritime and territorial jurisdiction provisions. But somebody has to want to prosecute the cases.

Senator Nelson noted that the Defense Department, which has reported 742 sexual assaults against soldiers and civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan, has claimed that it was unable to prosecute cases involving civilians—like defense contractor employees—until recently. (Even among those cases where it clearly had jurisdiction, a close look at the DoD's own stats reveals a far from

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Noted.

HOUSE OF BERLUSCONI: The most chilling moment during Italy's election campaign came when **Silvio Berlusconi** declared that his onetime factotum **Vittorio Mangano**—a Cosa Nostra boss later condemned to life imprisonment for two murders—was "a hero." It was as close as he could get to making an outright promise to Italy's Mafia that they would have a free hand if he were elected. Up North, meanwhile, Berlusconi's ally **Umberto Bossi** of the Lega Nord was crowing after his stunning success at the polls April 13–14, with almost twice the votes his party got in the 2006 election, enough to wrest control of two regions, Lombardy and the Veneto. A recent sample of that party's racist, xenophobic rhetoric from Radio Padania Libera: "It's easier to exterminate rats than eliminate the gypsies." Half the country ruled by the mob, the other half by rabid reactionaries: this was a worst-case scenario of what Berlusconi-Bossi's decisive victory—47 percent of the vote to the Partito Democratico's 38—could mean for Italy.

The biggest losers in the election were the coalition of radical-left parties known as the **Sinistra Arcobaleno**, which were wiped from the slate with vote percentages too low to qualify for either house of Parliament. It appears a sizable part of their base—working-class families struggling to make ends meet—voted for the Lega Nord. The other loser, the newly created, progressive **Partito Democratico**, actually improved its showing compared with what its component parties got in the last election. But it failed to persuade voters it could handle the coming economic turbulence and to find progressive answers to the impatient demands of Italy's productive heartland, the North. Now its job will be to mount a tough opposition—and try to keep Italy in one piece. FREDERIKA RANDALL

FAST-TRACK SLOW-UP: When George W. Bush sent the Colombia Free Trade Agreement to Congress, he expected a quick vote to knock down trade barriers with a country where the price of dissent—especially if it involves organizing a union—can be assassination. Ever since the Nixon Administration developed the "fast-track" model for approving trade agreements, Congress has played by White Houses rules. But when Bush pushed for his Colombia deal—which is opposed by labor and human rights activists, as well as Democratic presidential candidates **Barack Obama** and **Hillary Clinton**—House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** pushed back. She reasserted the role of Congress by pulling the Colombia FTA off the fast track, which would have forced an up-or-down vote in ninety days.

With the support of 224 House members—including six Republicans—Pelosi indefinitely delayed a vote until "we address the economic insecurity of America's working families." The Speaker's move upset the cozy, insider-led process by which trade deals have been effectively imposed on Congress by Democratic and Republican Presidents and legions of lobbyists—such as Clinton's former chief strategist, **Mark Penn**, who got caught promoting the Colombia pact while advising the suddenly populist presidential candidate. Pelosi's suspension of action has not killed the pact; the Speaker says there will be a vote eventually. That troubles Maine Democratic Congressman **Mike Michaud**, who has pressed Pelosi to take a tougher line on trade. Says Michaud, "Simply postponing consideration of the agreement in hopes of passing it at a later date is unacceptable.… We cannot allow the lives of unionists in Colombia and our jobs here at home to be used as bargaining chips for the Administration's misguided priorities." JOHN NICHOLS

READING MUQTADA IN KUWAIT? The Sunni countries of the Arabian Peninsula don't want anything to do with journalist **Patrick Cockburn**'s latest book, **Muqtada**. Of the eight nations that make up that region (Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen), seven have refused entry to an Arabic translation of the book. Cockburn's publisher—which had planned to publish the Arabic version—subsequently backed out of the deal. Cockburn suspects that the only nation to allow an Arabic translation is Yemen. The reason for this ban can be found in the book's subtitle, *Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq*. "The Sunni states would consider this revolutionary propaganda," Cockburn says. "They're opposed to the Shia. They consider them heretics and are frightened of them."

But banning Cockburn's book could have unexpected consequences. (For a demonstration, look no further than Tehran, where youngsters throw mixed parties behind closed doors and buck the prevailing Islamic law by drinking and dancing.) The Peninsula countries might do better to learn from the Iraqi government's costly mistake—excluding an important Shiite leader from the political process led to deadly confrontations with Sadr's followers—and do more to encourage an open internal dialogue. JAYATI VORA

THE ISRAEL LOBBY, REMIXED: "For too long, the only American voices on Israel have come from the far right," said **Jeremy Ben-Ami**, a former Clinton Administration staffer, during the launch of the pro-peace, pro-Israel lobby **J Street**. "[We] believe there's a better way to be pro-Israel" than simply supporting "military responses to political problems," he declared. Several months in the making, backed by a long list of prominent American Jews and Israelis—from **Alan Solomont**, former national finance chair of the DNC, to **David Kimche**, former director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, to **Sam Lewis**, former ambassador to Israel—J Street is conceived as a liberal counterpart to **AIPAC**, the hawkish lobby that has for decades kept a stranglehold on US Mideast policy. The organization will feature a lobbying arm and an online component that will seek to mobilize American Jews and other Israel supporters who don't buy the AIPAC line. A sister organization, J Street PAC, has been set up to support Congressional candidates who believe a negotiated resolution to the Israel/Palestine conflict is the only way to preserve the Jewish state's security. **Victor Kovner**, former corporation council for New York City and a veteran activist and fundraiser, called J Street "a long-overdue initiative." I'm inclined to agree. Better late than never. CHRISTOPHER HAYES

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stellar record: among the 684 sexual assault complaints lodged by US soldiers in the Middle East, only eighty-three cases have led to courts-martial. Meanwhile, last year alone, 2,688 sexual assaults were reported globally against women serving in the US Armed Forces; disposition of these cases is pending.)

Worse, those figures represent only the official count. Given that so many women are now coming forward complaining that they have been hushed by their private-military-contractor supervisors, it's clear that the real tally is likely far higher. Even in cases where the victims do report the incidents, most complaints never see the light of day, thanks to the fine print in employee contracts, which compels employees into private arbitration instead of allowing their charges to be heard in a public courtroom. Todd Kelly, a lawyer in Houston who is trying to fight the legality of private arbitration, says his firm alone has fifteen clients with sexual assault, sexual harassment or retaliation complaints (for reporting assault and/or harassment) against Halliburton and its former subsidiary KBR, as well as SEII.

Obviously, US military contractors have an interest in avoiding the bad publicity that would follow if these complaints were not kept secret. With huge sums hanging in the balance—KBR has an estimated $16 billion in contracts—the stakes are high.

But such a financial incentive cannot explain why the Justice Department has failed to act. Although it has the authority to pursue criminal cases involving US military contractor employees, it has hemmed and hawed over even the tiny fraction of cases that have made their way through the maze of obstacles to land in the Justice Department's offices. Grilling Justice about these twenty-four civilian sexual assault cases, Senator Nelson demanded to know exactly how many cases Justice was pursuing—and whether there had been a single conviction. "I don't know of any convictions for sexual assault," admitted Sigal Mandelker, deputy assistant attorney general for the Criminal Division. But, she stammered, "we do have active investigations…somewhere about…somewhere upwards of…somewhere between four and six, I believe is the number." (Leamon's attorney just learned that the department is initiating an investigation into her case.)

At the hearing, Nelson dryly observed that there was a very quick way to make sure US contractors did not force employees into private arbitration, and an easy way to force contractors to follow established protocols for sexual assault and harassment: "This might be something you want to require and include in your contracts—before you award them," he said. To which, in quick succession, the Defense, State and Justice department representatives responded that, well, they couldn't respond because this was, er, beyond their area of expertise. KAREN HOUPPERT

Karen Houppert, special correspondent for The Washington Post Magazine *and frequent* Nation *contributor, is the author of* Home Fires Burning: Married to the Military—for Better or Worse *(Ballantine).*

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Stephen Hadley Says An Olympic Boycott Is A 'Cop-out' on the Tibet Issue Compared With Our 'Quiet Diplomacy' With China

Yes, we pursue diplomacy.
The thugs in charge must really fear it.
It's quiet, as the cash flows on,
So quiet you can hardly hear it.

Seeking Superdelegates

The Democratic presidential race now turns on the 794 superdelegates, who can ratify or veto the voters' will. What will they do? To track the players in the Democrats' elitist endgame, an unprecedented campaign is now using the Internet to expose every last superdelegate.

Mark Myers, a technology analyst, music blogger and Floridian who did not vote in the state's primary, came up with the idea for an online hub where people could "shine a light" on this arcane process. Backed by a coalition of blogs and good-government websites, the Superdelegate Transparency Project (STP) posts political, professional and personal information about the people who will ultimately decide the nomination. In its first two months, the nonprofit site drew more than 160,000 visitors.

The project is "open source"—meaning that most of the onerous research is conducted by an army of self-appointed volunteers. They scour public records for information, posting it directly online and call superdelegates for interviews, waving only their "citizen media" credentials. About 215 unpaid researchers report to Amanda Michel, a former online campaign organizer who now works for the Huffington Post. "We're not trying to influence the end outcome," she says. But if the superdelegates can essentially pick the nominee, the public has a right to learn more about "who they are and why they're chosen." Transparency is STP's only stated goal. It does not back a particular candidate or advocate a metric for how the superdelegates should vote.

Nannette Isler, a Long Island pediatrician, volunteered for STP after learning about superdelegates' voting power, which she found unfair. She says the site gives "ordinary citizens a greater insight into the nomination process." Isler wrote profiles and conducted an hourlong interview with Stephen Fontana, a DNC member and State Representative in Connecticut. Fontana, who read about STP on blogs, says he feels an obligation to respond to "Democratic activists who are trying to make the process more transparent." That makes him an unusually open insider. So far only 15 percent of superdelegates have agreed to talk, according to the Huffington Post.

Not every superdelegate, however, is ducking the discussion. One new blog aims to tell the superdelegates' side of the story.

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At MrSuper.org, an anonymous superdelegate defends his fellow party officials against charges of elitism. After providing information to confirm his real identity by telephone, Mr. Super said the characterization of superdelegates as "unelected insiders" was inaccurate, since most run in local party elections and are answerable to constituents. He thinks sites like STP might even be more influential than the presidential campaigns, precisely because some superdelegates listen to their constituents more than to the famous politicos campaigns deploy to make their case.

Either way, Mr. Super's blog cracks open the door to the smoke-filled room by letting readers join the conversation. On April 2 a post waded into the fierce debate over whether superdelegates must vote in accordance with the voters' will, in response to a reader query. First Mr. Super dodged, saying his role required a "balancing act" of applying his views and "supporting the will of the people." The post drew thoughtful comments, then he responded several times and a civil debate ensued.

Conor Kenny, an STP editor, contends that Internet activism is not only exposing the superdelegates' "old model" of decision-making but also helping redefine their obligations. "The cultural phenomenon of open-source information" enables voters to make more informed demands of their party, he says, and to "hold the superdelegates accountable" to represent their constituents. And next to every superdelegate's name, the STP lists whether they "agree" with the voters in their district.

The superdelegate debate continues to play out across cyberspace and the entire party. More than 400,000 activists have already backed the democratic standard for superdelegates through an online petition from MoveOn.org (which endorsed Obama). Prominent Democrats unaffiliated with either campaign, like Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former Gore campaign manager Donna Brazile, proclaim that superdelegates must ratify the voters' will. Even some pro-Clinton superdelegates are echoing that position, like Representatives John Lewis and David Lewis, who withdrew Clinton endorsements after their districts overwhelmingly backed Obama. Whether driven by voters or the spotlight of Internet activism, a democratic standard augurs more attrition for Clinton than Obama. That's because twenty-two superdelegate politicians backing Clinton hail from areas Obama has won, while only twelve Obama backers face the reverse quandary, according to *Congressional Quarterly*.

Cementing a democratic standard for the Democratic nomination is an undeniable improvement. It is also, by definition, a departure from the old rules, which granted superdelegates independent power. They would never have to vote, after all, if the only valid choice was to ratify primary results. By democratizing the superdelegates' duty, Democrats may have found the backstop to keep from sliding toward another 1968, when the convention nomination process split the party and tarnished the nominee. After the last primaries end, it appears, there will be tremendous bottom-up pressure on superdelegates to uphold the popular will. Once activists ensure that superdelegates are reduced to a technicality, the party can make 2008 their finale, amending the rules to abolish superdelegates, finally removing elite supervision from the Democratic primaries. ARI MELBER

Ari Melber (amelber@hotmail.com) is The Nation*'s Net movement correspondent. For more information from STP: superdelegateinfo.org; demconwatch.blogspot.com; huffingtonpost.com/off-the-bus/.*

Nation Note

With this issue *The Nation* debuts a new feature: "Back Talk," Q&A's with literary, cultural and otherwise notable figures. "Back Talk" will appear on the last page of the magazine, where it will alternate from week to week with Frank W. Lewis's cryptic crossword. Puzzle fans need not feel crossed. The biweekly puzzle, as well as the solution to the previous puzzle, will be available online to all readers. This week "Back Talk" talks with Nicholson Baker.

Tough Love for Israel

We now have word that Tony Blair, envoy of the Middle East Quartet (the UN, the EU, Russia and the United States), and German Chancellor Angela Merkel intend to organize yet another peace conference, this time in Berlin in June. It is hard to believe that after the long string of failed peace initiatives, stretching back at least to the Madrid conference of 1991, diplomats are recycling these failures without seemingly having a clue as to why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is even more hopeless today than before these peace exercises first got under way.

COMMENT

The scandal of the international community's impotence in resolving one of history's longest bloodlettings is that it knows what the problem is but does not have the courage to speak the truth, much less deal with it. The peace conference in Germany will suffer from the same gutlessness that has marked all previous efforts. It will deal with everything except the problem primarily responsible for the impasse. That problem is that for all the sins attributable to the Palestinians—and they are legion, including inept and corrupt leadership, failed institution-building and the murderous violence of rejectionist groups—there is no prospect for a viable, sovereign Palestinian state, primarily because Israel's various governments, from 1967 until today, have never had the intention of allowing such a state to come into being.

It would be one thing if Israeli governments had insisted on delaying a Palestinian state until certain security concerns had been dealt with. But no government serious about a two-state solution to the conflict would have pursued, without letup, the theft and fragmentation of Palestinian lands, which even a child understands makes Palestinian statehood impossible.

Given the overwhelming disproportion of power between the occupier and the occupied, it is hardly surprising that Israeli governments and their military and security establishments found it difficult to resist the acquisition of Palestinian land. What is astounding is that the international community, pretending to believe Israel's claim that it is the victim and its occupied subjects the aggressors, has allowed this devastating dispossession to continue and the law of the jungle to prevail.

As long as Israel knows that by delaying the peace process it buys time to create facts on the ground, and that the international community will continue to indulge Israel's pretense that its desire for a two-state solution is being frustrated by the Pal-

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estinians, no new peace initiative can succeed, and the dispossession of the Palestinian people will indeed become irreversible.

There can be no greater delusion on the part of Western countries weighed down by guilt about the Holocaust than the belief that accommodating such an outcome would be an act of friendship to the Jewish people. The abandonment of the Palestinians now is surely not an atonement for the abandonment of European Jews seventy years ago, nor will it serve the security of the State of Israel and its people.

John Vinocur of the *New York Times* recently suggested that the virtually unqualified declarations of support for Israel by Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy are "at a minimum an attempt to seek Israeli moderation by means of public assurances with this tacit subtext: these days, the European Union is not, or is no longer, its reflexive antagonist." But the expectation that uncritical Western support of Israel would lead to greater Israeli moderation and greater willingness to take risks for peace is blatantly contradicted by the conflict's history.

Time and again, this history has shown that the less opposition Israel encounters from its friends in the West for its dispossession of the Palestinians, the more uncompromising its behavior. Indeed, soon after Sarkozy's and Merkel's expressions of eternal solidarity, Israel's Ehud Olmert approved massive new construction in East Jerusalem—authorizing housing projects that had been frozen for years by previous governments because of their destructive impact on the possibility of a peace agreement—as well as continued expansion of Israel's settlements. And Olmert's defense minister, Ehud Barak, declared shortly after Merkel's departure that he will remove only a token number of the more than 500 checkpoints and roadblocks that Israel has repeatedly promised, and just as repeatedly failed, to dismantle. That announcement shattered whatever hope Palestinians may have had for recovery of their economy, as a consequence of $7 billion in new aid promised by international donors in December. In these circumstances, the international donor community will not pour good money after bad, as they so often have in the past.

What is required of statesmen is not more peace conferences or clever adjustments to previous peace formulations but the moral and political courage to end their collaboration with the massive hoax the peace process has been turned into. Of course, Palestinian violence must be condemned and stopped, particularly when it targets civilians. But is it not utterly disingenuous to pretend that Israel's occupation—maintained by IDF-manned checkpoints and barricades, helicopter gunships, jet fighters, targeted assassinations and military incursions, not to speak of the massive theft of Palestinian lands—is not an exercise in continuous and unrelenting violence against more than 3 million Palestinian civilians? If Israel were to renounce violence, could the occupation last even one day?

Israel's designs on the West Bank are not much different from the designs of the Arab forces that attacked the Jewish state in 1948—the nullification of the international community's partition resolution of 1947. Short of addressing the problem by its right name—something that is of an entirely different order than hollow statements that "settlements do not advance peace"—and taking effective collective action to end a colonial enterprise that disgraces what began as a noble Jewish national liberation struggle, further peace conferences, no matter how well intentioned, make their participants accessories to one of the longest and cruelest deceptions in the annals of international diplomacy.

HENRY SIEGMAN

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Comix Nation

by STEVE BRODNER

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Eric Alterman

Motzira-Making on the Right

If you spent your pre-Passover Saturday morning, as I did, in synagogue reading Leviticus 14:1, you may have heard that Midrashic preachers used to enjoy creating puns on the word *metzora*, which means leper, and *motzira*, which means gossip or slander. Talmudic sage Rabbi Yosi ben Zimra has God addressing the tongue itself: "What else could I have done to rein you in, O tongue of deceit?" He asks.

One need not look far in our culture to grasp the relevance. In a recent *New Yorker* article, Jane Kramer recounts an audacious attempt by a coterie of right-wing Jews to interfere with the tenure process at Columbia's Barnard College. The case concerned anthropologist Nadia Abu El-Haj, the daughter of a Long Island Episcopalian mother and a secular Palestinian Muslim father, whose 2001 book, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (University of Chicago), examined the role of archaeology in alleged biblical validation of the Jewish claim to Israel/Palestine. The tenure question proved a purely academic one in every sense of the word. Her book was recognized by the Middle East Studies Association of North America as one of the winners of its 2002 Albert Hourani Book Award. In addition, El-Haj had been approved by three separate tenure committees before reaching the final one.

That's when a group led by an American-born West Bank settler named Paula Stern, who owned a small technical writing business, emulating campaigns by the likes of David Horowitz and Daniel Pipes and their organizations Campus Watch and *FrontPage* magazine, started making *motzira*. She created an Internet petition calling on Columbia to reject El-Haj, insisting that her scholarship was substandard and corrupted by an alleged hatred of Israel. Denying El-Haj tenure became a cause célèbre among this community of right-wing Jews, neoconservative adventurers and pseudoscholars, much as preventing Yale from hiring the much-admired Middle East historian (and blogger) Juan Cole had galvanized a similar group in 2006. The targets this time were Columbia alumni, in particular, large donors.

The campaign was a house of sand from the start. In October 2007 Larry Cohler-Esses, editor at large of the *Jewish Week*, with Richard Silverstein of the Tikun Olam weblog, debunked Stern's charges, and she admitted that the information contained in her petition might not be "100 percent accurate." Her admission was consistent with the observation of Jonathan Boyarin, whom Kramer describes as an Orthodox Jewish academic and El-Haj's friend, that the underlying motivation of the *motzira*-makers was a desire to express their Jewishness through an uncompromising defense of the Jewish state. Boyarin said he could not identify a single "reasoned, progressive scholar who's on the same side as those guys" in their attempt to undermine El-Haj's scholarship and deny her tenure.

To be honest, I know nothing about the quality of El-Haj's anthropological arguments or of her feelings about Israel. Regarding the former, how fortunate I was not appointed to her tenure committee. And regarding the latter, well, so what? Have we really reached the point where a person's politics, alleged or no, are somehow relevant to determining the worthiness of his or her scholarship? And if so, why stop at scholarship? Shouldn't auto mechanics or oral surgeons be asked to fill out political questionnaires before we hire them as well?

And what are we to make of scholars like Pipes, Columbia epidemiologist Judith Jacobson, Barnard religion professor Alan Segal, former SUNY Purchase archaeology lecturer Alexander Joffe and others associated with the misnamed Scholars for Peace in the Middle East who have joined such efforts to intervene in the time-honored tradition of politically disinterested tenure?

The antics of Horowitz—direct political descendant of Joe McCarthy—are no secret to the readers of this column. Pipes, whom Wikipedia identifies as the son of famed right-wing historian of the Russian Revolution Richard Pipes, is not nearly so well-known, but he enjoys significant scholarly credentials. He has taught at numerous respected universities and is treated in the media as an impartial expert on Middle Eastern matters. This is true despite the fact that his work on the Arab world was accurately characterized in one 1983 *Washington Post* book review as displaying "a disturbing hostility to contemporary Muslims," of being "frequently contemptuous of them" and of being "marred by exaggerations, inconsistencies, and evidence of hostility to the subject." (Like Horowitz's various tentacles, his organization Campus Watch offers its kosher seal of approval for ideologically kosher academics while attacking all others.) In his discussion of the El-Haj case, Pipes gives away the game by publicly renouncing the entire concept of academic freedom. University-based scholars, he explains, "are financed by the public and are thus accountable in some way to the public. They say, No, only we can judge and evaluate each other's work. Well, that's not how things work in this country."

Actually, it *is* how things work, at least at Barnard, where El-Haj was eventually tenured. The larger question of why any respected scholar anywhere would wish to associate him- or herself with such shameful sentiments, however, remains. And why do journalists continue to treat such academics as legitimate practitioners of scholarly debate? True, it is not always easy for a journalist to judge bona fides, but the case of Pipes is an open-and-shut one. Journalists' unwillingness to investigate such questions results in the perpetuation of no end of purposeful disinformation. Al Gore has noted, for instance, that despite the fact that virtually no disagreement can be found among peer-reviewed scientific journal articles regarding the reality of global warming, more than half of mainstream press articles until recently continued to dispute it.

Rabbi ben Zimra would know just what to say. ■

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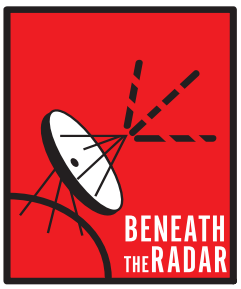
Gary Younge

Bitter Fruit in Pennsylvania

Like many, if not most, readers of this magazine, I often vote against my economic interests. Whenever I vote for a candidate who wants to redistribute wealth—which is basically whenever I vote—I am electing to make myself poorer. Like many of you, then, I am a values voter. There are more important things to me than money. This is not entirely selfless. I vote not only for a world I want to see but a world I want to be part of and a world I think would welcome me as part of it. It has never really occurred to me that I might cast a vote in solidarity with those who earn like me.

So the fact that so many white working-class people in this country vote Republican does not strike me, a priori, as an aberration. That they put different priorities (like opposing gay marriage or abortion) ahead of their financial well-being does not mean they are any less savvy about their interests than I am. I think their priorities are wrong. But I don't think them irrational.



Barack Obama was quick to admit—as he should have been—that his characterization of poor white Pennsylvanians as "bitter" people who "cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations" was a mistake. To suggest that poor white people who vote Republican in this country are the victims of a collective electoral false consciousness is as convenient as it is deluded. It forgoes any effort to understand why they do what they do or how we might persuade them to do otherwise, suggesting instead we are high-minded and they have been hoodwinked. If that's our attitude, no wonder they vote for the other side. Ask any neocon, and he'll tell you—trying to liberate people who have no interest in the freedom you have in store for them is an exhausting and unrewarding business.

But that doesn't mean Obama was entirely wrong. Poor white people all over this country have plenty to be bitter about. Their jobs are being outsourced, their wages are stagnant and their home values are falling. At the same time, their health costs and college fees are rising and unemployment rates are rising. When it comes to social mobility, the essential ingredient of the American dream, this country's class system is going backward. According to most respected calculations, America has a more class-ridden society today than most of Europe, including my native England. That is saying something. But Obama was stupid. In response to a question about why he wasn't doing better with a certain group of voters, he blamed the voters. Worse still, strategically, he disparaged a group of poor people from whom he needs votes to a group of rich people from whom he needs money.

Whether coastal liberals like it or not, guns, God, whiteness and patriotism are important to lots of people in this country. If you want them to vote on the basis of different priorities, then you need to give them something to vote for. Unlike Republicans, who openly lobby for the class interests of their corporate supporters and deliver on them, Democrats do not promise substantial changes to the lives of ordinary working people and rarely deliver even on the symbolic ones. In short, Democrats demand a greater class attachment than they offer and therefore deserve.

But if Obama's remarks were gauche, the responses they have elicited have been galling. Since Hillary Clinton and John McCain supported NAFTA, among a host of other measures that have undermined the livelihoods of working-class Americans, they were ill equipped to tackle what was fundamentally wrong with Obama's comments. So rather than attack the entitlement implicit in the message, they went for the aesthetic qualities of the messenger. Senator Clinton (Wellesley, Yale, Wal-Mart) branded Obama (Punahou, Columbia, Harvard) an "elitist," and McCain (the son and grandson of four-star admirals, educated at a Virginia prep school and the US Naval Academy) called him "out of touch." And so the political elite, drawn from the social elite and funded by the economic elite, trade blows over who is the most effete. Unable to talk about the working class as a group with a collective set of interests that are different from and at times antagonistic to the interests of corporations and the state, they elevate it to a cultural artifact. The fact that the controversy over Obama's comments did not appear to affect his standing in the polls suggests that it resonated only among the media elites.

As factories close and homes foreclose, society becomes divided not between corporation and union or Wall Street and Main Street but between regular and latte or Budweiser and chardonnay. As happened with John Edwards's haircut, John Kerry's windsurfing and Al Gore's earth tones, those who claim to speak for, or even about, working-class people are ruled admissible not in terms of what they would or would not do but how they do or do not appear. Class is not elevated to politics but reduced to a performance, rendering George W. Bush—the teetotaling son of a President—the down-to-earth candidate you would most like to have a drink with.

"You always have this question that erupts around election time: who would you rather have a beer with?" explained Contessa Brewer on MSNBC. "And so it's not just what the candidates are saying to appeal to folks—they want to be seen as the guy or the gal next door—but they also have to do it."

"And let's not forget Barack Obama bowling," replied Reuters Washington correspondent Jon Decker. "You know, for someone who's in a bowling league in northeast central Pennsylvania, in Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, they can't identify with someone getting a thirty-seven over seven frames."

Presumably they would have a lot more in common with the person who bowls 112 and then lays them off and steals their pension. ■

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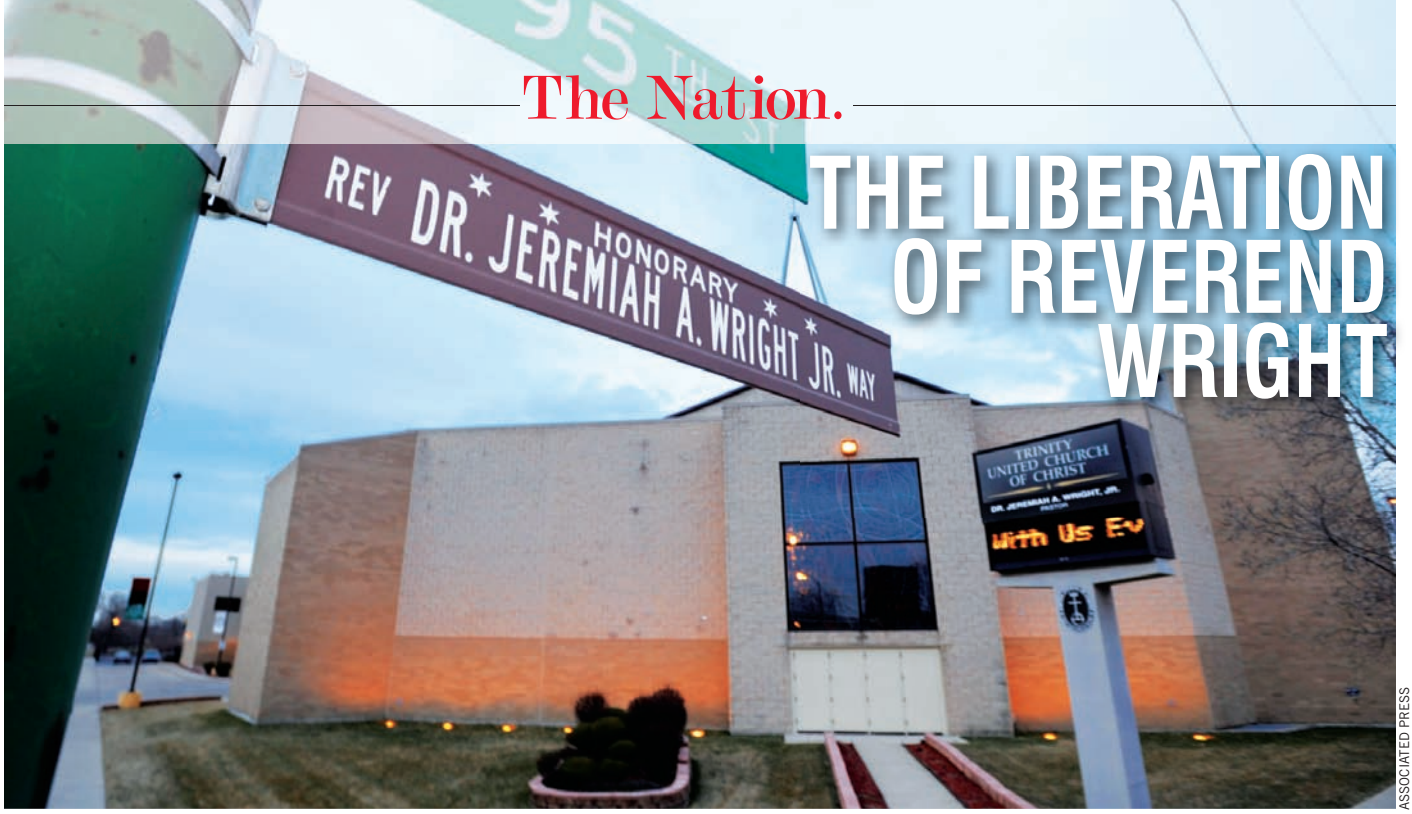
THE LIBERATION OF REVEREND WRIGHT



ASSOCIATED PRESS

The media storm over Obama's former pastor has painted Trinity Church as a separatist, racist institution, but such accounts misrepresent the black church and its rhetorical traditions.

by EUDORA SMITH

Chicago

The notes posted on the glass doors of Trinity United Church of Christ reflect the state of siege at Barack Obama's home church: "Media must sign in at the front desk." "No cameras or recording devices allowed inside." The press has been relentless in its pursuit of church members ever since snippets of sermons by the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Obama's former pastor, appeared on the Internet more than a month ago. Like Louis Farrakhan before him, Wright has become a litmus test for Obama with white voters. His sermons—in which he says that America is run by "rich white people" and talks about "America's chickens coming home to roost" on September 11—have been described as "racist" and "unpatriotic." As scrutiny intensified on the 8,000-member congregation, its motto, "Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian," was characterized as black separatist. For many at Trinity, which I often attend, the final insult came when some journalists called the homes of sick and elderly members, whose names are published in a weekly list of "shut-ins."

Trinity's members are certainly not naïve enough to think they could escape media scrutiny. But underlying the coverage of this story, which is punctuated with words like "inflammatory" and "controversial," is a sense that something is fundamentally wrong, perhaps even pathological, about Wright and the teachings at Trinity. These accounts, however, misrepresent the black church, whose rhetorical traditions meld biblical allegory with contemporary political and racial concerns, and whose sanctuaries provide a rare space where a collective black racial consciousness can be expressed uncensored by others.

"I think that a lot of the media, particularly the mainstream media, have no experience of the everyday life of the black church…and especially what the church service on Sunday means for the black community in general," says Dwight Hopkins, a professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School and a member of Trinity. Hopkins describes the black church as a "sacred and cultural phenomenon," a "way station" that functions as an antidote to the six days of the week where race matters. In the black church, race isn't a source of contention; it's a source of community.

Part of the cultural phenomenon Hopkins speaks of is a prophetic style of preaching. As Peter Gomes of Harvard University's Divinity School recently said in a *Washington Post* blog, "It may surprise many in white America, for whom Martin Luther King Jr. is the only black preacher of whom they have ever heard, to learn that there are a lot of Jeremiah Wrights out there who week after week give expression to that classic definition of prophetic preaching that is to 'comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.'"

The Rev. Otis Moss III, Trinity's current pastor, echoed that theme in an April sermon linked to the fortieth anniversary of the assassination of King. Like the prophets of the Bible, and Jesus himself, who called out the moral failings of the powerful, King took America to task for racism and poverty, Moss said. Grasping the connection with their own embattled senior pastor, the congregation exploded in shouts of "Tell it!" and "Make it plain!"

For many black churchgoers, the attack on Wright is an assault on how they choose to worship. Though the black church is not without its flaws and shortcomings—on more than one occasion, Wright has called out the behavior of other

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"I want the readers of *The Nation* to know that I have loathed Hearst and his papers since I can remember. Keep up the good fight to stem the tide of the black forces let loose by Hearst and his clique."
—*Emma Goldman* (1935)
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black ministers, and the rise of prosperity teachings has cut into the tradition of afflicting the comfortable—it has endured as a powerful cultural and social institution because it is needed. As long as racism exists, the church provides a sanctuary for many black folks.

Rooted in the secret gatherings of slaves in the South who were introduced to Christianity by "plantation missionaries," the church has fed the spirit, while at the same time organizing and tending to the most basic physical needs of its members, explains James Cone, a professor at Union Theological Seminary. "The black church was the only thing we owned," says Cone, an architect of Black Liberation Theology whose teaching has influenced Trinity. "It was both a spiritual and political institution."

Wright may be Obama's litmus test, but the treatment of African-Americans, brought to this country chained in the belly of slave ships, has been the litmus test for America's moral character. Historically, black preachers have taken the nation to task for its sin of racism. The independently owned and controlled black church allowed them the financial freedom to invoke the name of the Lord in the crusade for justice—from the days of Reconstruction to the civil rights movement, which Cone calls "the perfect expression" of the black church tradition.

Black Liberation Theology confronted the public identity of Christianity as white and reaffirmed a Gospel that stood firmly with the oppressed.

Steeped in biblical symbolism and a belief in a higher moral authority, the church has been a fitting vehicle for social justice movements. The best prophetic preachers can turn the Old Testament narrative of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt into a parable about contemporary African-American tribulations, from the poll tax to police brutality to the 2000 election fraud in Florida. On Sunday, in the powerful allegory of the black church, the oppressive Pharaoh and President Bush could be one and the same.

"Trinity's preaching is very much in keeping with African-American and United Church of Christ traditions, which is to be publicly engaging—challenging government, challenging systems, challenging structures. At the same time, it is a safe space for the predominantly African-American community to speak with one's parishioners," says the Rev. J. Bennett Guess, communications director of the United Church of Christ [UCC]. "You don't have to back up. You don't have to justify. You don't have to prove it. It is shared experience." As a result, Wright's sermons don't always sit well with the uninitiated, says Guess. "Sometimes they are difficult to hear, especially if you are not accustomed to that style of worship."

Wright and Moss both draw on a prophetic style of preaching common to the black church, but Trinity's practice of Black Liberation Theology is not as widespread in the black church at large, although its principles of social justice are. The product of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Black Liberation Theology confronted the public identity of Christianity as white and reaffirmed a Gospel that stood firmly with the oppressed. Politically, it attempted to reconcile the Christian, nonviolent identity of those who marched with King with the black, more militant identity espoused by Malcolm X.

"With the emergence of the Black Power movement, we also wanted to be black Christians who were concerned about cultural liberation—to be freely black and politically liberated to achieve the kind of freedom the civil rights movement was advocating," says Cone. "What we wanted to do was bring Malcolm and Martin together."

Another goal of Black Liberation Theology, according to Cone, was "an internal liberation" that shook off the shame of being black, which had been ground into African-Americans by the ideology of black inferiority (and white supremacy) that justified slavery. "That's why you have that cultural emphasis," Cone says.

At Trinity, the red, black and green flag (the so-called Black Liberation flag) that stands near the pulpit is an affirmation of a black identity in a country where the notion of black beauty is still called into question by the pejorative use of terms such as "nappy-headed." As one of 250 black congregations in a denomination of 5,700 churches, Trinity also reflects the UCC's traditions of social justice.

Created in 1957, the UCC traces its roots back to the "people of the Mayflower" and the early New England Congregational Church, which ordained the first African-American pastor in 1785 and the first woman pastor in 1853. The UCC ordained the first openly gay pastor in 1972. The Congregational Church's most famous role in American history was its successful legal defense of the slaves of the Amistad, who commandeered the slave ship in 1839, finally landing on Long Island, where they were arrested.

God calls members of the church to be "agents of change" and "agents of reconciliation," says Guess, explaining UCC's interpretation of the Gospel. It is this calling that is being tested in Chicago.

Each Sunday a senior member of UCC, which is based in Cleveland, attends services at Trinity to offer encouragement to members. The denomination has bought full-page ads in the *New York Times* and *USA Today* to clarify its teachings and support Trinity. The UCC and the National Council of Churches have called for a "sacred conversation" on race in churches across the nation on May 18 in the hope of developing a substantive dialogue about the issue.

Members of Trinity have been largely silent in the mainstream media, instead choosing to tell their story by posting Wright's sermons online and through testimonials that present a more complete image of the senior pastor, like a recent commentary in the *Chicago Tribune* by William Von Hoene Jr., a white member. He explained how Wright convinced his wife, who is African-American, that marrying him was the right thing to do, despite the challenges they might face as a couple. Breaking down racial barriers, Wright told the man,

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was how one made progress on issues of race.

In the sanctuary these days, there are many new white faces—a professor and his sociology students from a local university, teenagers from a church in a small rural town between Chicago and Wisconsin. These visitors are friends and supporters for whom the media controversy has inspired a journey of understanding. On a recent Sunday, Moss warned them that Trinity is a "hugging" church, and when the congregation paused from the service to greet one another, the visitors were swept into Trinity's collective embrace. Their presence is treated like the rainbow sign God sent Noah after the Flood.

But the most powerful response to the media storm surrounding Trinity is in the Sunday morning worship services. The choir sings as if attempting to pierce heaven. A wave of emotion washes over the singers, whose shouts of "Thank you, Lord!" are matched by those of the congregation, which sways side to side. The pastor's voice is as sturdy as God's trombone when he compares King to Joseph in the Old Testament, two men who suffered in this life because they dreamed of a better world. And in a display of the call-and-response tradition of the black church at its best, when Reverend Moss says, "What man meant for evil," the congregation, without a pause, replies, "God meant for good." ■

The Keys to the Keystone State

Obama is attracting white suburban Republicans near Philadelphia, but he faces serious challenges in small towns, where racial and ethnic conflicts have been simmering.

Bowling for Pennsylvania

by GAIUTRA BAHADUR

Hazleton

When Barack Obama went bowling in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on March 29, his opponent was Senator Bob Casey Jr., the son and namesake of a popular former governor whose coal-mining pedigree had made him a hero of the white working class. Casey Junior had just endorsed Obama, and the presidential candidate, wearing blue-and-white Velcro shoes and a tie, bowled gutter ball after gutter ball and lost the game. But Obama wasn't at Pleasant Valley Lanes to knock down pins; he was there to win over white blue-collar voters and thus prove to Democrats that he is "electable" in November.

In the iconography of the campaign, bowling might have been a bid for some cred with the white working class, but it also signifies community ties of the kind eulogized by Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone*. Putnam mourned the fact that while more Americans are bowling, fewer are doing so in leagues, a sign of a breakdown in civic bonding and engagement. Recently, Putnam put forward evidence that diversity hurts social capital: that residents of mixed-race communities trust one another less, volunteer less, vote less and hunker down more in front of their televisions. Whether or not Putnam's dystopian theory holds true will be crucial to Obama's chances in Pennsylvania and perhaps in a general election contest against John McCain. Do people in checkerboard communities turn inward and away from one another, and does that make them more susceptible to campaigning that plays on racial and ethnic divisions?

The primary results so far suggest that Obama's challenge lies in diverse states. He has scored victories in overwhelmingly white states, such as Idaho and North Dakota, and states with black populations large enough to tilt the race, such as Mississippi and Louisiana. But Hillary Clinton has prevailed in places like New Jersey and Massachusetts, where the black population is large enough for race to be regularly injected into the political discourse but not large enough to decide the vote on its own. Pennsylvania fits that profile. Eleven percent of its population is black, and 4 percent is Latino. Bookended by the heavily minority cities of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, its vast middle is what James Carville once called "Alabama in between." Obama was referring to this stretch of farmland and former coal and steel towns recently when he said, "You go into these small towns in Pennsylvania and…the jobs have been gone now for twenty-five years, and nothing's replaced them. It's not surprising, then, they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations." Both Clinton and McCain promptly labeled him an "elitist" for these remarks, but whatever the fallout, his comments underscore a key task ahead. Can Obama overcome that "antipathy" and get mixed communities to bowl together?

Hazleton, a working-class town of about 25,000 in the foothills of the Poconos, is just the sort of place to tell. Democrats outnumber Republicans two to one, and unions run as deep as the disused mine shafts in the now-fallow fields of anthracite coal surrounding it. The region gave birth to the Molly Maguires, the infamous secret organization of Irish-Americans that organized miners to strike after the Civil War (and murdered their opponents in the police). But this Democratic stronghold has a Republican mayor: Louis Barletta, who ran against himself for a second term in 2007. He was his own party's candidate, and he won the Democratic primary as a write-in.

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If you're like me, you'd love to get Mom into the electronic family loop. My mom doesn't want to use a computer, so until now I haven't been able to send her email. Recently, a friend told me about a great solution she found. It's called the HP Printing Mailbox with Presto Service, and it lets her send email, photos, and PDF documents to her parents even though they don't have a

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Stay Connected to Family

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Barletta's cross-party popularity stems from his national headline–grabbing response to recent demographic changes in Hazleton. In the late '90s, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans from New York City started moving in, often next door to the grandchildren of immigrant coal miners from Italy, Ireland and Germany. The Latino newcomers, who now account for 14 percent of the school population, remade the town into a cultural crossroads, a place that recognizes the first day of deer season as a formal work holiday but also boasts a botanica on the main drag. In the eyes of some residents, they also brought big-city problems such as drugs, crime and overburdened schools and hospitals. The backlash found expression in a town ordinance that banned hiring or renting to illegal immigrants, though hard figures on the numbers of the undocumented there have never been presented. Dozens of cities across the country copied the law, and media outlets across the world descended on Hazleton to cover the apparent trespass on federal turf. The ordinance, which also made English the town's official language, drove a wedge between the mostly white, long-term residents and the Latino transplants, both white and black.

The median household income in Hazleton is $28,000. In this hard-bitten terrain, there is profound nostalgia for Bill Clinton's presidency.

Support for Hillary Clinton may straddle the immigration divide. Her father's family, the Rodhams, have had ties to nearby Scranton for generations, and the region views her as "a hometown girl." More important, Hazleton's population base overlaps with her political base: the elderly, Latinos and the working class. The median home price in the city is $67,000, the median household income is $28,000 and only 11 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree. One-fifth of the county works in retail or food services, at an average annual salary under $20,000. Two major industrial parks—home to warehouses and a Cargill meat processing plant—anchor the local economy with low-wage jobs staffed significantly through temp agencies.

In this hard-bitten terrain, there is profound nostalgia for Bill Clinton's presidency, when, as one resident put it, "the economy was as good as it's ever been." José Perez, a cashier at Quisqueya Restaurant on East Broad Street, emigrated from the Dominican Republic during the Clinton years. A new citizen, he will vote for a President of the United States for the first time this year. He'll probably choose Hillary Clinton. He saw an ad for her on Telemundo, and, he said in Spanish, "I liked her husband."

A mile up the road, at the Bowl Arena, a truck driver with Eastern European coal miners in his family tree said virtually the same thing, but in English: "I like what Bill Clinton did. Bill can have a big part in being First Man." The truck driver, Jason Yost, is a Michael Moore look-alike, bespectacled and overweight, with a baseball cap pulled over strings of brown hair and a gold cross hanging over a Hard Rock Cafe T-shirt. He goes to the same church that Perez does: St. Gabriel's, located in what was once an Irish, now Latino, enclave. But the two men attend separate masses, one in Spanish, the other in English, with choirs set at two different tempos. And they stand on opposite sides of the battle over the local immigration ordinance—Yost supporting it from the sidelines, Perez feeling like an indirect target of it.

If Clinton defeats Obama in Pennsylvania, towns in the middle of the state that are, like Hazleton, grappling with rapid changes in hue may make the difference. Nationwide, there have already been disturbing signs of diversity's discontent. A Pew poll conducted at the end of March suggests that anxiety about race and immigration underlies the attitudes of white Democrats who dislike Obama. One in four white Democrats with a negative opinion of him believes he is Muslim. (Despite the highly publicized comments by Jeremiah Wright, his pastor from Trinity United Church of Christ, 10 percent of all voters believe Obama is Muslim.) And white Democrats who don't favor him are much more likely than those who do to believe that interracial dating is wrong, that immigrants pose a threat to American values and that equal rights for minorities have been pushed too far.

Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell, a Clinton backer, cued this part of the state's electorate in comments to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* in February: "You've got some conservative whites here, and I think there are some whites who are probably not ready to vote for an African-American candidate."

Consider one stark example from another corner of Pennsylvania that, like Hazleton, has seen both diversity and its backlash: South Philadelphia, home to Geno's, the neon-lit cheesesteak emporium that posted signs at its take-out window reading, "This is AMERICA. WHEN ORDERING please 'SPEAK ENGLISH.'" At a cafe a few blocks away, a regular asked about Obama replied: "Who is he? Where did he come from? What was he? In South Carolina, picking cotton?" A construction contractor who gave the name Mike Giordano said he did not watch Obama's speech on race after the Wright controversy broke because "I don't listen to those people. They don't make sense when they talk." And he summed up the presidential contest this way: "They put a senior citizen for President, a woman and a black man. What do you got? Nothing. But that woman's got balls."

Obama is expected to carry Philadelphia as a whole, but it is less clear how South Philadelphia will vote. As in Hazleton, mixed demographics could determine the course it takes. The neighborhood is the turf of Rocky, the white working-class icon co-opted by the Clinton campaign despite the fact that his alter ego, Sylvester Stallone, backs McCain. Its row houses are also populated by a cross section of classes, ethnicities and tenures in the neighborhood: African-Americans; old-timers descended from Italian and Irish immigrants; new migrants from Mexico, Vietnam, Indonesia and Cambodia; and gentrifiers ranging from young professionals to retired empty nesters.

The National Civic League designated Hazleton an All-America City in 1964, and it is still home to churches and other institutions that, Putnam argues, are key to building trust among neighbors. Truck driver Yost, for instance, does not bowl alone. He belongs to a league, known as The Food League because most members wait tables at Applebee's and

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Fibonacci numbers, an intricate number pattern known as a recurrence sequence, appear throughout nature in unexpected places like the spirals of shells.

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Edward B. Burger, Professor of Mathematics in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at Williams College, earned his Ph.D. from The University of Texas at Austin. Professor Burger's teaching and scholarly works have been nationally recognized; most recently, Williams College awarded Professor Burger the 2007 Nelson Bushnell Prize for Scholarship and Teaching.

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other area restaurants. A banner subtitled "Bowl for Kids" advertises a fundraiser for the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization, and an American flag hangs beside the bowling pins. Despite these signs of a healthy civic life, a report by pollster John Zogby, commissioned after the immigration issue erupted and based on interviews with almost 200 residents, concluded that Hazletonians "perceive a loss of community over the past several decades" that mirrors the national retreat to backyards and TV rooms. Zogby's survey also laid bare a belief among local Latinos that they are racially profiled and discriminated against in schools, for jobs and by the police and news media.

With Barletta running against incumbent Democrat Paul Kanjorski for Congress in a race that has generated more heat and attention locally than the presidential contest, immigration is likely to be on the minds of primary voters on April 22. Clinton and Obama have virtually identical stances on the issue, but it still has the power to divide voters along the lines of race. A chasm of mistrust and self-censorship has opened up between residents, says Anna Arias, a social worker for the Diocese of Scranton. Her outspoken opposition to Barletta's ordinance—"If you pass this," she told the City Council, "you will [make this] the first Nazi city in the country"—cost her friends. Arias was a child in the Dominican Republic when dictator Rafael Trujillo was assassinated. A parrot in the house had been trained to squawk "Viva Trujillo!" and it continued to swear out its loyalty even after the dictator's burial. She remembers that Dominicans behaved like that parrot for a long time, though the despot was dead. "There wasn't a lot of trust," she says. "People were still afraid to speak their true sentiments." The immigration ordinance in Hazleton has brought that parrot back to her vividly. "It became the unspoken topic," she says, "because you don't know who agrees and who disagrees, and you're kind of afraid to find out."

The volunteers who started an unofficial Obama office in Hazleton, where 'Obama Girl' grew up, are almost all non-Hispanic white.

Latinos nationwide have backed Clinton in such large numbers that Obama's local volunteers did not push hard to register new Latino voters here by a late March deadline, although they actively courted other groups. But Arias is backing Obama, partly because he represents the kind of bridge-building she says needs to happen in Hazleton. So is Agapito Lopez, a retired eye surgeon from Hazleton and another brawler against the local immigration ordinance. Lopez says that Obama "has gone through lots of discrimination himself, and he would better understand the way immigrants feel when they are discriminated against." Both Lopez and Arias doubt that local whites will vote for Obama because of the racialized tensions facing their once homogeneous town. Rocky Brown, manager of radio station WAZL, "The Voice of Hazleton," agrees. "The Illegal Immigration Relief Act very much polarized this community, to the point where I think those who would find Lou Barletta acceptable may very well find Hillary Clinton acceptable," he said. By this logic, Barletta backers who believe he was trying to defend the town against outsiders of a different ethnicity would vote for Clinton simply because she is white like them. And they would never send a half-black man who also happens to be the son of a foreigner to the White House.

There are indications, however, that Hazleton can transcend balloting by identity politics. Jack Mundie, a councilman who voted for the immigration ordinance, will also vote for Obama because he sees the Illinois senator as a unifier. Another supporter who might bewilder the pundits is Pearl Gobrick, a carpenter's widow in her 80s who was learning how to merengue with other elderly whites at a Hazleton restaurant one night in late March. "I just like the guy," she said. "Hillary will do anything to get there [to the White House]. Right now, she's trying to knock him down.… He had that nice speech about the colored, and not knocking people down." The volunteers who started an Obama office in downtown Hazleton are almost all non-Hispanic white. They include a Republican mortgage broker who, angered by the war in Iraq, said she thinks Obama represents an end to twenty years of Bushes and Clintons. The support from unlikely quarters appears rooted, at least in part, in Obama's charisma. Never mind that "Obama Girl"—the model who stars in barelypolitical.com's tongue-in-cheek music video "I Got a Crush on Obama"—grew up in Hazleton. The Pew poll in late March—the same one that reported racist and anti-immigrant views among Obama's detractors—also found that large majorities of white Democrats nationwide like him better than they like Clinton: more view him as honest, inspiring and down-to-earth.

A day after the (unofficial) local Obama headquarters opened in late March, a passer-by walked into the beige clapboard house donated by a realtor and plastered with Irish-Americans for Obama fliers picturing the Kennedys. "How youse doin'?" he greeted Bob and Elaine Curry, the team leaders for the office. "You're husband and wife, right?"

Jimmy, the owner of Babe's II Bar and Restaurant, asked for buttons and fliers. He asked Bob if his sister was the Curry who used to live down by the junkyard. And he told Elaine, a medical librarian and president of the Hazleton area school board, that she was doing a good job. "All my friends are going with Clinton, but I'm turning the coat," said Jimmy, who is white. He left with an Obama poster to hang in his bar.

The Currys received two anonymous letters by mail the week the office opened. One chided: "You should be supporting Hillary. The Clintons have been good for this country." The other accused Obama of being unpatriotic, citing the American flag pin missing from his lapel. But the couple are convinced he will do much better than anticipated in Hazleton.

"He's still up against it in this community," said Bob Curry, the manager of a Barnes & Noble in nearby Wilkes-Barre. "But people are still conscious of the difficulties their grandparents had. Not everyone whose grandfather was called a dirty wop will make the connection [to racism against African-Americans or new immigrants], but enough of us do make the connections.… It would be a mistake to sell them short." ■

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Pennsylvania's 'Obamicans'

by ARI BERMAN

Doylestown

It's the first Friday of April, and the tony main drag of this affluent exurb, thirty-five miles northeast of Philadelphia, is lined with people visiting the town's cafes, galleries and bars. Doylestown is the political heart of Bucks County, one of the oldest and most hotly contested swing areas of the state. Three weeks before the state's Democratic primary, Obama and Clinton supporters wave signs on every corner, and seemingly every other person sports a campaign sticker. "Seeing such outward Democratic activism in Doylestown is a little mind-blowing to me," says Jordan Yeager, a local lawyer and Democratic Party organizer.

Doylestown, like much of Bucks County, used to be deeply, proudly, Republican. "In my youth, in central Bucks County, I grew up without knowing any Democrats," James Michener wrote in *Report of the County Chairman*, his account of volunteering for John F. Kennedy in 1960. "My mother thought there might be some on the edge of town, but she preferred not to speak of them." Things began to change in 1992, when the recession that year pushed Bucks County toward Bill Clinton. In the following years, as the GOP increasingly became identified with the religious right, the county voted for Democrats for President. Yet until recently, Republicans controlled all the levers of local government. "When I moved here five years ago, I was told to register as a Republican because that's the way business is done around here," says Allen McQuarie, an Obama volunteer who came from the nearby town of Holland.

A surge of Democratic activism in the past few years has turned Doylestown, and much of the county, from red to purple—and quite possibly to blue. In 2003 Republicans dominated the borough council 9-0; now it's 6-3 Democratic. After sending Republicans to Congress in every election since 1993, in 2006 Bucks County's 8th Congressional District elected Democrat Patrick Murphy, a 34-year-old Iraq War vet. In January there were 21,000 more registered Republicans than Democrats in Bucks. By early April, thanks to a massive voter-registration drive, Democrats outnumbered Republicans for the first time since 1978, when Democrats briefly held sway after Watergate. "The Bush presidency has tarnished the Republican brand and provided an opening to listen to the other side," says Neil Samuels, deputy chair of the Bucks County Democratic Party.

What's happening in Bucks mirrors trends throughout Pennsylvania, where the state Democratic Party has added a remarkable 300,000 voters since January. Nearly half of these Democrats, according to the state board of elections, are new or previously unregistered voters lured by the excitement of the Clinton-Obama race. The other half are former Republicans and independents who switched to vote in the Democratic primary, mostly for Obama. Before the March 24 registration deadline (only registered Democrats may vote in the April 22 primary), the Obama campaign made an all-out effort to convert disaffected Republicans, otherwise known as "Obamicans."

In Bucks County there are "regular Obamicans"—former Republicans who volunteer only occasionally for Obama, if at all—and "super-volunteer Obamicans," Yeager tells me, half-jokingly. Christine Harrison, a peppy former travel agent who dates her ancestry back to President Benjamin Harrison, is a super-volunteer Obamican. Raised in a family of lifelong Republicans, Harrison has never in her life voted for a Democrat. But after watching the Democratic debates and Obama's victory speech in Iowa, she caught the Obama bug. Harrison attended the opening of his office in Doylestown, the Friday before Super Tuesday, and met Peachy Myers, an energetic veteran of Obama's South Carolina field team, who asked her to volunteer. "I told her I'm a Republican and she said, That's OK," Harrison recalls. "So I said, Well, let me be your very first Obamican! And I changed my registration right there." Harrison's now a volunteer coordinator for Obama, spending all her waking hours helping to get a Democrat elected President. Ten members of Harrison's all-Republican family have since changed their affiliation—all for Obama.

Victor Unger, an 80-year-old retired research director for a chemical company, is more of a regular Obamican. Unger has been a Republican since he moved to Bucks County in 1968. Almost two years ago Unger and his wife, a Democrat, heard Obama speak about his book *The Audacity of Hope*. Unger read both of Obama's books and "was really impressed by his intellect." "He's running at the right time in our history," he says. Unger changed his registration in March and began occasionally stopping by the Obama office to help out where needed.

It seems like every prominent Democrat in Bucks used to be a Republican—or is married to one. Congressman Patrick Murphy's wife, Jennifer, a 33-year-old lawyer, is another lifelong Republican. "Every time I went to the polls I saw a Clinton or a Bush on the ballot, and I voted for a Bush or against Clinton every time," Murphy says. Her husband was the first Democrat Murphy ever voted for, and Obama will be the second.

Like many Republicans in Bucks County, Murphy describes herself as fiscally conservative and socially moderate. "I still, for the most part, consider myself a Republican," she says, and inverts Ronald Reagan's famous maxim: "I didn't leave the Republican Party, the Republican Party and this President left me." Disaffected Republicans in Bucks, furious at how George W. Bush and the religious right hijacked their grand old party, are voting Democratic in the primary out of frustration, not because Rush Limbaugh told them to. The quagmire in Iraq and the downturn in the economy matter to these voters, but so do issues of personal freedom, like reproductive rights, technological advances like stem-cell research and protecting the environment—all neglected or opposed by the current GOP.

Bucks County, though almost entirely white, is still a good microcosm of Pennsylvania as a whole, which in turn looks like much of America. There's blue-collar, heavily Democratic Lower Bucks County, near Philadelphia; the more affluent and politically mixed areas in the middle like Doylestown; and Upper Bucks County, which is predominantly rural and Republican. After visiting Doylestown I stopped by the newly opened Obama campaign office in Quakertown, nestled in the rolling hills and farmland of Upper Bucks. Voters here tend to be more

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conservative, fiscally and socially, than the rest of the county. Yet on a brisk Sunday afternoon, a steady stream of Republican switchers walked through the doors of the Obama office. Each one pointed to a specific conversion moment. For Barbara Baker, a registered nurse, it was Obama's electrifying speech at the Democratic convention in 2004. For Carl Soderberg, an office supervisor at a mail-order company, it was the "excitement in the air after Iowa." For Jane Shafer, a retired Montessori school teacher, it was Obama's "eloquence" and stance on education. For Maryeileen Wojt, a registered nurse, and her husband, a financial trader, it was the threat of a looming economic recession. Wojt is antichoice, supports restrictions on stem-cell research and still has a Bush/Cheney sign in her basement. "Our country is in such a desperate state," Wojt said, "that we saw Obama as the only hope and possibility."

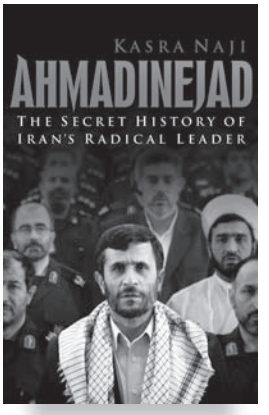
Many of these Obamicans are voting as much against the Clintons as for Obama. "I hate the Clintons," Harrison told me point-blank. "I find Bill fairly reprehensible," Unger said, "and have overwhelmingly negative feelings toward Hillary." "I don't trust her. She's not ethical," Wojt said. Many Obamicans, these included, said they'd vote for John McCain in the general election if Clinton was the Democratic nominee, or wouldn't vote at all. Harrison said all ten members of her family would switch back to the GOP. (Of course, Clinton supporters sometimes say the same thing about Obama, although support for her is more likely to come from core Democratic constituencies. I asked the Clinton campaign to provide me with a list of switchers to interview in Bucks County. It didn't.)

Obama's Republican supporters see in him what Bush promised to be in 2000: a great uniter. "He doesn't see me as a sworn mortal enemy because I'm a Republican," Jennifer Murphy says. Clinton and Obama may be virtually indistinguishable liberals on most policy positions, but Obamicans see their man as a kindred spirit, someone who will—as his campaign often reminds us—bring people together and bridge the partisan divide.

Before the '06 elections, I interviewed a bunch of former Republicans in Bucks County who were voting Democratic primarily because of the war in Iraq and the scandals of the Republican Congress. What's striking—and a little disturbing—about the Obamican phenomenon in '08 is how much it rests not so much on specific issues but on the candidate's personal characteristics and calls to transcend race and achieve political unity. Will these same voters still support him when Obama tries to withdraw from Iraq, or pass universal healthcare, or raise taxes on the rich, or push for any number of policy programs that are likely to anger many core Republicans? The Obamicans could turn out to be just another passing political fad. After all, conservative columnists like David Brooks and George Will heaped praise on Obama early in the campaign season, only to turn against him later. In a general election, McCain—with his maverick reputation, however dated or inaccurate—could stop the bleeding in places like Bucks County, keeping the remaining moderate Republicans in the GOP fold.

Obama is expected to do well in Philadelphia and its suburbs, but he faces an uphill climb in the rest of the state. Yet if he can go on to win the nomination and keep his Republican converts in the Democratic column come November, and beyond, he may achieve what no President since Reagan has—an enduring realignment of crossover voters. ■

World Leaders



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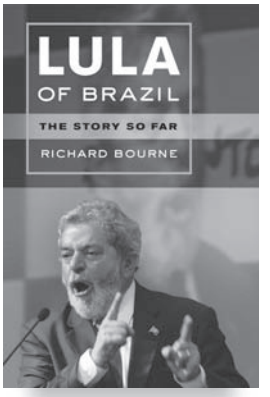

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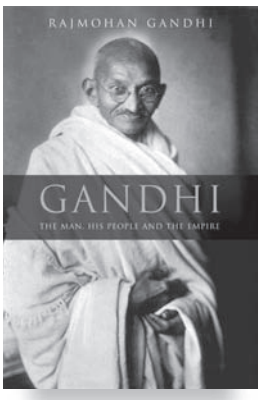

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—Geoffrey C. Ward, prizewinning biographer of Franklin Roosevelt and scriptwriter for Ken Burns documentary *The War*
Winner of the Barpujari Prize from the Indian History Congress

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Leaving Cheyenne Mountain

Or, how I learned to start worrying and loathe the bomb.

by WILLIAM J. ASTORE

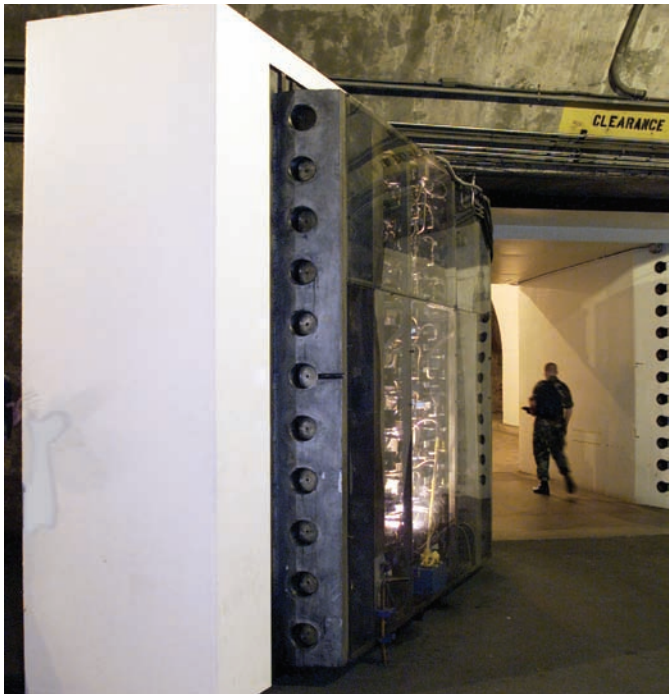
It took three years just to excavate that mountain redoubt outside Colorado Springs, that cold war citadel whose two huge blast doors weighed twenty-five tons each. Within its confines, under 2,000 feet of Rocky Mountain granite, fifteen buildings were mounted on steel springs, each spring weighing nearly half a ton, so that when the Soviet nukes exploded, each building would sway but not collapse.

When it became operational in 1966, the Cheyenne Mountain Complex was the ultimate bomb shelter. Its 200 or so crew members were believed to have a 70 percent likelihood of surviving a five-megaton blast with a three-mile circular error of probability, even if the surrounding countryside became an irradiated wasteland. Today, more than four decades later, the complex remains an important command center, though in 2006 the military announced that it would now serve primarily as a backup facility (on "warm standby," in military jargon).

From 1985 to 1988, in the waning years of the cold war, as a young Air Force lieutenant, my job took me inside that mountain citadel. The approach to it wasn't in any way awesome, since the mountain, at the south end of the Front Range, is overshadowed by Pike's Peak. Except for all the communication antennas blinking red at night, you'd hardly know it was the site of a major command center for nuclear war. Yet each time I drove up its access road, its solid granite bulk made an impression; so, too, did the security fence topped by cameras and razor wire, the police toting M-16s and the massive access tunnel, bored out of solid rock and paved for vehicular traffic that still leads inside the mountain to the actual command center.

Like cereal-box atomic decoder rings and "duck and cover" exercises, the complex is a relic of the cold war era. I entered on a bus that, though painted Air Force blue, was similar to the ones I had taken in grade school. On a few nights I left work after the last bus had taken off and had to hike the third of a mile out of the tunnel, a claustrophobic and often bone-chilling experience in the windy and wintry Rockies—until, that is, you emerged into a starry night above, with the lights of the city twinkling below.

Of that mountain, meant to corral and contain our nuclear fears, what struck most first-time visitors were the steel-reinforced blast doors, more than ten feet high and several feet thick. They were supposed to seal the complex, protecting it from a nuclear strike. Then there were the enormous springs (1,319 in all) on which each of the fifteen buildings inside the mountain



REUTERS / RICK WILKING

Steel door protecting the Cheyenne Mountain Complex, home of NORAD

rest. I liked to think of them as giant (if immobile) Slinkies. As visitors got their bearings, they were sometimes disconcerted by the bolts embedded in the granite walls and ceiling. These held wire mesh, meant to stabilize the rock and protect against falling shards. Exposed pipes and cables gave the mountain a style that might be termed "early industrial chic"—one you sometimes see echoed today in high-end lofts and dance clubs.

The blast doors were usually open—except, of course, during "exercises," when the mountain "buttoned up" its self-contained world. Along with enough food and other provisions to weather any initial rounds of earthly devastation, the mountain also had four freshwater reservoirs, each with a holding capacity of 1.5 million gallons. The inside joke was that the complex, technically an Air Force station, had its very own navy—the rowboats used to cross the reservoirs (though, sad to say, I never used one). Today, when I think of them, the River Styx and Charon come to mind.

Images of the underworld were then, and remain, all too appropriate. By the time I was inside Cheyenne Mountain, we knew it was vulnerable to a new generation of high-yield, highly accurate Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). In case of a full-fledged nuclear war, as a popular poster of the 1970s put it, we had no doubt that we could "bend over and kiss your ass goodbye."

The citadel that had been built to ensure official survival during a planetary holocaust was, by then, sure to be among the initial targets struck by those ICBMs—perhaps a dozen or more warheads—to ensure a "first-strike kill." Our job was simply to detect the coming nuclear attack by the Soviets and act quickly enough to coordinate a retaliatory strike—to ensure that the Soviet part of the planet went down—before we were obliterated, along with Colorado Springs (a "target-rich" city that

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includes Fort Carson to the south, Peterson Air Force Base to the east and the US Air Force Academy to the north).

Launched over the North Pole from missile fields in the USSR, those Soviet ICBMs would explode over American cities in thirty minutes. Reacting before they hit placed a premium on decisions based on computers and early-warning satellites. Due to the hair-trigger nature of such a scenario, human errors and system malfunctions were inevitable. One false alarm came on November 9, 1979, when a technician mistakenly loaded a training tape that simulated a full-scale Soviet missile attack. Two false alarms followed less than a year later, on June 3 and June 6, 1980, and were eventually traced, according to an official Air Force release, to a defective integrated circuit, a silicon chip that cost less than $100. In each case, the Strategic Air Command (SAC) alerted ICBM crews and scrambled air crews to nuclear-armed B-52s, which were warming up engines for take-off before the alarms were rescinded.

Mountain Men

Cheyenne Mountain was something more than a bastion to seal in our nuclear fears. It was also a repository of our technological dreams and a response (however feeble) to our technological nightmares. In this high-tech, man-made cave, we could for a moment forget how hydrogen bombs had reduced the bravest of warriors to inconsequential matter. To this end, we cultivated a quiet professionalism—a studied detachment from our surroundings as well as the implications of cold war deterrence theory.

That said, working within the mountain was decidedly unglamorous. Obviously, there were no windows, so no natural light. Air circulated artificially (and noisily). As big as that cavern sometimes seemed, space was often at a premium in a complex manned 24/7—with at least a brigadier general always on duty in case the "nuclear balloon" went up. (I recall one quiet midshift when I read several chapters of Tom Clancy's *Red Storm Rising*. The irony was not lost on me.) Crew members sat in the Missile Warning Center in front of consoles, processing data from satellites and other sensors. The most vital of these were the supersecret DSP satellites used to detect Soviet missile launches. I worked mostly in the Space Surveillance Center, which kept track of the objects orbiting Earth, including lost wrenches and shattered satellites—tedious but necessary work that involved weekly software "crashes."

The men and women who served in the complex were anything but Strangelovean. The US strategy of that time, known as mutually assured destruction (which boiled down to the distinctly Strangelovean acronym of MAD), may have been comical in an obscenely dark way, but the crew members did their duty with little fanfare. Like them, I was caught up in "the mission," in making everything work, even if everything included a potentially world-ending event. We all, each in his or her own mundane way, became servants of the early-warning machinery of nuclear war. We were, as technology critic Lewis Mumford might have put it then, "encapsulated men" serving the Pentagonal megamachine.

"Manly" military glory was still an ever-present ideal in those years; but, as we all were well aware, it lay somewhere beyond the mountain and missile silos in the so-called air-breathing element of the Strategic Air Command. It was the property of the air jockeys in the long-range bombers. Today, it's not the brilliant but intentionally deviant *Dr. Strangelove* that really catches the ethos of that SAC moment: a certain cocksure insouciance toward what bombing actually meant when your planes were nuclear-armed. For that, check out the 1963 movie *A Gathering of Eagles*, starring Rock Hudson and Rod Taylor. Watch for the scene in which Taylor resolutely reacts to the news of a no-notice, make-or-break "Operational Readiness Inspection"—the dreaded ORI. He rips off his tie, Clark Kent–style, exposing an impressive thatch of chest hair. It's a classic embodiment of testosterone-driven, hard-charging command, whose endpoint is redemption for him as well as the wing—not the extinction of life as we know it.

Certainly, though, *Dr. Strangelove* did a better job of capturing the surreal world of nuclear theory *outside* Cheyenne Mountain, rather than the humdrum one inside the complex. Serving in SAC in the early 1970s, for instance, my brother routinely appended to its official motto, "Peace is Our Profession," the unofficial but popular "War is our hobby." That, after all, was more consistent with the mailed fist that dominated SAC's emblem. While it clearly existed to deter nuclear wars, SAC also stood ready to fight and "win" them. As late as 1999, one B-1 bomber pilot assured me, straight-faced, "Don't tell me we can't win a nuclear war—that's what I train for." Buck Turgidson, eat your heart out.

In 1986, the year Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev teetered on the brink of eliminating superpower nuclear weapons at their summit meeting in Reykjavik, I participated in a computerized war game inside Cheyenne Mountain. It ended in a simulated nuclear attack against the United States. By today's standards, our computers were primitive leviathans: IBM mainframes with old-fashioned tape drives—roughly the size of jumbo subzero refrigerators in today's McMansions; they had disk drives, or "packs," roughly the size of dishwashers. Our computer screens were a monochromatic green. From a Hollywood special-effects perspective, they were poorly lit and relentlessly boring—not at all like the glitzy nuclear war room in the 1983 film *WarGames*, which starred a fresh-faced Matthew Broderick.

As those monochromatic missile tracks crossed the Arctic Circle and began to terminate at various US cities, the mood among the battle staff grew reflective. Yes, it was only a game, but everyone knew that nuclear Armageddon with the Soviet Union *was* possible, and that it would kill tens, perhaps hundreds, of millions of people in both countries. That day in that command center we were virtual witnesses to our worst nightmare: a nuclear holocaust that might not only destroy our country and the Soviet Union but civilization as we knew it.

How We Never Left Cheyenne Mountain

When the Soviet Union began its collapse in 1989, few people were more surprised than our intelligence agencies and our military (myself included). After putting decades of thought and planning into mutually assured destruction, after planning not just to fight but to win nuclear wars, we now faced a brighter, potentially less nuclear, or even nonnuclear, future. And all this had come about—under the shadow of true global terror—without a Department of Homeland Security or an Orwellian "Patriot

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Act" or so many of the other accouterments of our present homeland security moment (without, in fact, even the emotive, vaguely un-American word "homeland" being in use).

Indeed, when it was over, we claimed victory on the very basis that our freedoms, and our political system, were stronger than our rival's. We had, those declaring victory claimed, trusted and empowered the people, not an ossified state bureaucracy.

The optimism of 1990 was strikingly mainstream. President George H.W. Bush spoke of "a new era, freer from the threat of [nuclear] terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice and more secure in the quest for peace." We were supposedly lining up as a society to cash in our "peace dividend" chips, with our winnings designated for pressing domestic concerns. Like President Warren Harding, who campaigned for a return to "normalcy" after World War I, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan's tough-talking ambassador to the United Nations, wrote that after so many decades of vigilance and sacrifice, we could once again become "a normal country in a normal time."

But it never happened. Instead of normalcy, we remained hunkered down in Cheyenne Mountain. We continued to look fearfully out at the world while arming ourselves to the teeth. We became wedded to the idea of bunkers and barriers, whether fortified fences along the Mexican border, imperial military bases along the peripheries of a swollen empire or, on a micro scale, security gates patrolled by small armies of private guards to keep the have-nots out of have communities. (To these, the ultrarich have now added "panic rooms" in their mansions—tiny domestic Cheyenne Mountains secured by mini steel blast doors, monitored by cameras and stocked with provisions.) After the attacks of September 11, 2001, it was as if we had "buttoned up" and slammed shut the blast doors to Fortress America.

How did the planet's self-proclaimed "sole superpower" in its moment of triumph become such a fearful country? In our endless face-off with the Soviet Union, did we come to resemble it far more than we ever imagined? After all, instead of the USSR, it's now we who are fighting a difficult war in Afghanistan; it's now we who are deflating our currency with massive deficits for weapons of marginal utility; it's now we who put forward unilateral proposals for earth-penetrating, bunker-busting nukes; it's now we who are often seen as aggressors on the world stage.

As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the agreement creating the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) in May, isn't it high time we closed those twenty-five-ton blast doors one last time and, without glancing back, walked toward those starry skies and the twinkling lights of that city in the distance? Isn't it high time we fulfilled the Reykjavik dream?

As Americans, shouldn't we again learn to start worrying and loathe the bomb—so much that we roll up our collective sleeves and work to eliminate it from our planet? It's never too late to cash in whatever peace-dividend chips remain. And as we walk away with the last of our cold war winnings, no matter how meager, let's leave behind as well the bunker and barrier mentality that went with them. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

almost every American I know and knew.

If an Obama Administration can accomplish what the New Deal did, there will be much for Americans to look forward to.
R.H. Weber

Santa Monica, Calif.

I appreciated the reminders that many of the things I enjoy today I owe to the New Deal, whether hiking trails built by the CCC, power from projects like Hoover Dam (which, by the way, employed my father) or my own prosperity, which rests partly on the fact that because of the Railroad Retirement and Social Security acts, I did not have to sacrifice to support my parents in their post-retirement years.
Louise West

Killingworth, Conn.

The last time I read *The Nation* I was in college, forty-odd years ago. A professor said most college students were liberal and would become more conservative as they aged. For myself it's been the opposite. Your recent issue on the New Deal was excellent. I'm signing up. From *National Review* to *The Nation* in a single lifetime!
James F. Elliman

Whoooooom Said the Owl?

Jersey City, N.J.

So the grammarians are unhappy with your March 24 headline "Who Would Jesus Vote For?" ["Letters," April 21]. Their displeasure is unwarranted. The use of "who" as the first word in a question has been natural for 500 years, despite the efforts of grammarians to make English conform to the rules of Latin. The teaching of Latinate grammar serves to train a populace in obedience to the orders, however unreasonable, of those in authority.
John Rouse

Campbell, Calif.

"For Whom Would Jesus Vote?" Huh? This is so incredibly stilted! You had it exactly right. The marvel of English is its ability to evolve. Street language? Perhaps. But for clarity and simplicity, I'll take "who" every time.
Richard Calderhead
Publisher, Itsez *(http://itsez.org)*

Charleston, Ill.

"Who" has been substituted for "whom" as far back as the fourteenth century. There are numerous occurrences in Shakespeare: for example, when Polonius asks, "What is the matter, my lord?" Hamlet replies, "Between who?" Other instances can be cited from the writings of such authors as Dickens, Henry Adams, Hemingway, Faulkner, Garrison Keillor, even conservative language maven William Safire, who wrote (in 1987), "Let tomorrow's people decide who they want to be their President." In fact, Safire pointed out that "at the beginning of a sentence, whom comes across as an affectation" (1996).

Other interrogative and relative pronouns (which, what, that) have only one form, which functions for both the subjective and objective cases, and no one is confused or offended. There is no reason to have two case forms for who.

"Who Would Jesus Vote For" is a perfectly clear, concise, grammatical question. All speakers of English readily understand it. Using "whom" instead adds nothing, except a note of supercilious pedantry.
Robert Funk

Port Hueneme, Calif.

Concerning complaints on "Who Would Jesus Vote For?": such arrant pedantry you should not up with put.
Richard D. Erlich

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Books & the Arts.

Arms and the Right

by DANIEL LAZARE

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"The Duel," from *Harper's* magazine, January 1857

Like the Third Amendment against the peacetime quartering of soldiers in private homes, the Second Amendment used to be one of those obscure constitutional provisions that Americans could safely ignore. Legal opinion was agreed: this relic of the late eighteenth century did not confer an individual right "to keep and bear arms," only a collective right on the part of the states to maintain well-regulated militias in the form of local units of the National Guard. While a few gun nuts insisted on their Second Amendment right to turn their homes into mini-arsenals, everyone else knew they were deluded. Everyone knew this because the Supreme Court had supposedly settled the matter by unanimously dismissing any suggestion of an individual right in 1939.

But now everyone knows something else. Ever since a University of Texas law professor named Sanford Levinson published a seminal article, "The Embarrassing Second Amendment," in the *Yale Law Journal* in 1989, the legal academy has had to take another look at a provision that Laurence Tribe, the doyen of liberal constitutionalists, described ten years earlier as having no effect on gun control and as "merely ancillary to other constitutional guarantees of state sovereignty." Now such comfy notions are out the window as the National Rifle Association's view that the Second Amendment confers an individual right to own guns gains ground. While some scholars, such as Mark Tushnet, author of the new study *Out of Range*, argue that an individual-rights reading still allows for extensive gun control, others are frank enough to admit they're not sure what this oddly constructed amendment does and does not allow (although they'll still hazard a guess). As a prominent constitutional scholar named William Van Alstyne once remarked, "No provision in the Constitution causes one to stumble quite so much on a first reading, or second, or third reading." It is as if the legal academy, shaking its head over the First Amendment, suddenly could not make up its mind as to whether that hallowed text protected free speech or prohibited it.

What's going on here? Surely a mere twenty-seven words, loosely tethered together by three commas and one period, can't be that impenetrable. But they are; and if ever there was a Churchillian "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma," the Second Amendment is it.

Perhaps the best way to begin unraveling this puzzle is to think of the amendment not as a law but, with apologies to Tom Peyer and Hart Seely, as a bit of blank verse:

> A well regulated Militia,
> being necessary to the security of a
> free State,
> the right of the people to keep and
> bear Arms,
> shall not be infringed.

It's rhythmic and also somewhat strange, as proper modern verse should be. As to what it actually means, the questions begin with "well regulated" in line one. The phrase is confusing because when Americans hear the word "regulation" or any of its cognates, they usually think of government restrictions on individual liberty. But if a government-regulated militia is necessary for a free society (the meaning, presumably, of "a free State"), then how can the amendment mandate an individual right that the same government must not infringe? It is as if the amendment were telling government to intervene and not intervene at the same time.

This is certainly a head-scratcher. Yet the questions go on. Another concerns line

Out of Range
Why the Constitution Can't End the Battle Over Guns.
By Mark V. Tushnet.
Oxford. 156 pp. $19.95.

Ricochet
Confessions of a Gun Lobbyist.
By Richard Feldman.
John Wiley. 296 pp. $24.95.

Daniel Lazare is the author, most recently, of The Velvet Coup: The Constitution, the Supreme Court, and the Decline of American Democracy *(Verso). He is currently at work on a book about the politics of Christianity, Judaism and Islam for Pantheon.*

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two, which, while asserting that the militia is "necessary to the security of a free State," does not pause to explain why. Perhaps the connection was self-evident in the eighteenth century, but it is certainly not in the twenty-first. Today, we can think of a lot of things that are important to the survival of a free society: democratic expression, honest and fair elections, a good educational system, and a sound and equitable economy. So why does the amendment "privilege" a well-regulated militia above all others?

Finally, there are the questions posed by lines three and four. Why "keep and bear" rather than just "bear"? What does "Arms" mean—muskets, pistols, assault rifles, grenade launchers, nukes? Finally, concerning the phrase "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms," the individualist interpretation holds that eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans viewed this as part of a natural right of armed resistance against tyranny. But if this was the case, why put it in writing? After all, Americans were well armed in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War and hair-trigger sensitive to any new tyrannical threat. Why, then, approve an amendment acknowledging the obvious? After asking Americans to ratify a new plan of government, why did the founders then request that they assert their right to overthrow it?

Why "keep and bear" rather than just "bear"? What does "Arms" mean: muskets, pistols, nukes?

Questions like these are the subject of Tushnet's *Out of Range*. With the Supreme Court poised to issue its first gun-rights decision in nearly seven decades in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, a case the Court heard on March 18 and that involves one of the most sweeping citywide gun bans in the country, Tushnet's brief but dense primer on the Second Amendment and its relationship to the gun-control battles of the last quarter-century could not be more timely. Unfortunately, it also could not be more frustrating. Tushnet, a professor at Harvard Law School, suffers from an excess of caution. Understandably, he is determined not to be one of those overconfident types who, as he puts it, are just "blowing smoke" in claiming to know precisely what the Second Amendment means. As a consequence, he advances a couple of possibilities as to what it *might* mean, explains why one interpretation *may* have an edge over the other and then announces that the whole question may be beside the point, since it has little to do with reducing gun-related crime. In fact, he argues that the long-running debate over the Second Amendment may be

> really about something else—not about what the Second Amendment means, or about how to reduce violence, but…about how we understand ourselves as Americans. Get that straight, and the fights over the Second Amendment would go away. But, of course, we *can't* get our national self-understanding straight, because we are always trying to figure out who we are, and revising our self-understandings. And so the battle over the Second Amendment will continue.

Like a patient on a psychiatrist's couch, Americans thus talk about the Second Amendment to avoid talking about peskier matters, in this case highly sensitive topics having to do with national identity and purpose. So we keep talking because we don't know how to stop.

But this is unfair, since Americans have no choice but to talk about a law they can neither change (thanks to the highly restrictive amending clause in Article V of the Constitution) nor even fully understand (thanks to the pervasive ambiguity of its twenty-seven words). Still, *Out of Range* attempts to explain the inexplicable by approaching the Second Amendment from two angles: its original meaning at the time of its adoption as part of the Bill of Rights in 1791 and the meaning it has acquired through judicial interpretation and political practice in the centuries since.

In purely historical terms, Tushnet says, the answer on balance seems more or less clear. Lines one and two, which compose something of a preamble, are plainly the product of an eighteenth-century ideology known as civic republicanism, a school of thought almost paranoid in its tendency to see tyranny forever lurking around the corner. Tushnet's discussion of this school is somewhat cursory (as he admits), but a host of historians, from Bernard Bailyn to Isaac Kramnick, have described it as consisting of a series of polarities between political power, on the one hand, and the people, on the other. If the people are soft, lazy and corrupt, they will easily succumb to a tyrant's rule. Conversely, if they are proud, brave and alert, then would-be oppressors, sensing that the people are keen to defend their liberties, will back off. While a popular militia is important in this respect, no less important are the values, habits and attitudes that accompany it—vigor, courage, a martial spirit ("keep and bear" turns out to be a military term), plus a steely determination born of the knowledge that "those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom," to quote Tom Paine, "must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it."

All of which suggests a broad reading of the Second Amendment, one that holds that a well-regulated militia is not the only social benefit that arises from widespread gun ownership but merely one of many. As Tushnet puts it, "Once each of us has the right to keep and bear arms, we can use the right however we want—but always preserving the possibility that we will use it to defend against government oppression." Guns are good in their own right because guns, military training and liberty are all inextricably linked.

But what about "well regulated"—surely that phrase suggests a government-controlled militia along the lines of today's National Guard? Not quite. In eighteenth-century parlance, regulation could take the form of a militia either spontaneously created by individuals or decreed by the state. Tushnet points out that the financially distressed farmers who participated in Daniel Shays's agrarian uprising in western Massachusetts in 1786 called themselves "regulators." Even though Tushnet doesn't mention it, the North Carolina frontiersmen who rose up against unfair colonial tax policies some twenty years earlier did so as well. Hence, there was nothing strange or inconsistent about regulation mustered from below by individuals rather than enforced from above by the state. Indeed, the Virginia Ratifying Convention in 1788 implied as much when it declared "that the people have the right to keep and bear arms [and] that a well regulated militia composed of the body of the people trained to arms is the proper, natural, and safe defense of a free state." Such a militia would be well regulated to the degree it was composed of the people as a whole.

This is no doubt the sort of thinking one would expect of a postrevolutionary society in which the people had just used their weapons to overthrow one government and were leery of laying them aside as another was taking shape. But the notion that "we the people" would reserve the right to take up arms against a government that "we" had just created seems contradictory. After all, if it's a people's government, who would the people revolt against—themselves? Still,

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HEALTHNEWS

Surgery Can't Fix Dark Circles!

Finally, researchers have developed the first product to combine a clinically proven compound to reduce those dark under-eye circles and simultaneously reduce fine lines and wrinkles, resulting in noticeably younger looking eyes.

—By Sarah Tucker

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REDUCES WRINKLES	✓		✓

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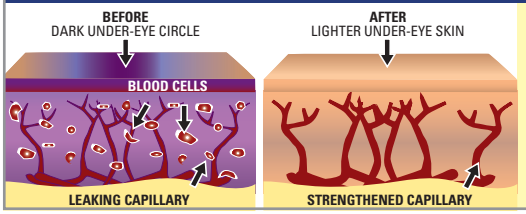

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Americans clearly believed in a natural right of revolution in the event that power was misused or usurped, and they further believed that their Constitution should acknowledge as much. In a document festooned with checks and balances, this was to be the ultimate check, one directed against government *tout court*.

While one can quarrel about the details, it would thus appear that the NRA has been correct all along concerning the Second Amendment's original intent to guarantee an individual right to bear arms. But Tushnet adds that there is also the question of how the amendment has come to be understood in the years since. Once the Constitution was ratified and the new Republic began taking its first wobbly steps, three things happened: militias fell by the wayside as Americans discovered they had better ways to spend their time than drilling on the village green; politicians and the police took fright when guns began showing up in the hands of people they didn't like, such as newly freed blacks or left-wing radicals; and public safety became more and more of a concern as urbanization rose.

When it comes to the Second Amendment, we are tyrannized by a fear of popular tyranny.

Thus, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story complained in 1833 about "a growing indifference to any system of militia discipline, and a strong disposition, from a sense of its burthens, to be rid of all regulations." In 1879 the Illinois state legislature outlawed private militias after 400 or so German socialists paraded through Chicago with swords and guns, while the Supreme Court's 1939 decision *United States v. Miller* upheld a ban on sawed-off shotguns on the grounds that such weapons had nothing to do with maintaining a well-regulated militia. However scattershot, various gun-control measures have proliferated since the 1930s, prohibiting certain types of firearms (Tommy guns), forbidding certain people from owning them (felons and fugitives), establishing "gun-free school zones" and so on, all based on a collective-right reading holding that government has free rein to do what it wishes to maintain public safety. By the time Tribe published his famous textbook, *American Constitutional Law*, in 1978, any concept of an individual right to bear arms had effectively disappeared. The Second Amendment, *American Constitutional Law* announced, was irrelevant when it came to "purely private conduct" in the form of gun ownership. Gun control could therefore go forward unimpeded.

In retrospect, Tribe's textbook was plainly the high-water mark for the "collective right" interpretation. Eleven years later, Levinson published his *Yale Law Journal* article, complaining that "for too long, most members of the legal academy have treated the Second Amendment as the equivalent of an embarrassing relative, whose mention brings a quick change of subject to other, more respectable, family members." In fact, intellectual honesty dictated that they recognize there was more to the amendment than they had been willing to admit.

While Tribe has since come around to the individual-rights point of view (the 2000 edition of *American Constitutional Law* contains a ten-page reconsideration of the subject), he is now among those arguing that, notwithstanding such a right, firearms are still "subject to reasonable regulation in the interest of public safety" and that "laws that ban certain types of weapons, that require safety devices on others and that otherwise impose strict controls on guns can pass Constitutional scrutiny." Tushnet agrees, noting that the Pennsylvania State Constitutional Convention declared in 1788 that "no law shall be passed for disarming the people…unless for crimes committed, or real danger of public injury from individuals," a clear indication that public safety was a concern even in the Republic's earliest days. He observes that, in what has been called "America's first gun control movement," state legislatures followed up in the 1810s with laws against concealed weapons, bowie knives and the like for the same reason. Today, there is no shortage of gun-control laws even in states that recognize a constitutional right to bear arms, yet the courts have not seen a conflict. "Indeed," says Tushnet, "it's hard to identify a gun-control policy that has *not* been upheld against challenges based on state constitutional guarantees of an individual right to keep and bear arms."

In other words, we can all relax. Given its current conservative lineup, the Supreme Court will almost certainly uphold an individual right to bear arms in *District of Columbia v. Heller*. But while gun prohibition or equally sweeping licensing laws will probably not be permissible, lesser forms of gun control are still acceptable. Thus, things will continue pretty much unchanged. Lawyers will go back to arguing whether banning assault weapons passes constitutional muster, while the NRA will go back to complaining that we are all on a slippery slope to tyranny. Moms will march for gun control, hunters will campaign against it and "cold dead hands" bumper stickers will continue to proliferate on pickups. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même Scheiss*.

Or so Tushnet suggests, although some of us may not be so sanguine. The problem may be an excessively narrow reading of the Second Amendment and the broader Constitution of which it is a part. Law professors, not surprisingly, tend to think of the Constitution as the law. But it is also a plan of government and a blueprint shaping American thought on such topics as democracy, civil liberties and popular sovereignty. Hence, while an individualist reading of the Second Amendment will certainly affect gun control in some fashion, that is not all it will affect. It will also send a powerfully coded message about the proper relationship between the people and their government and the nature of political authority. It is this aspect of the Second Amendment as opposed to its strictly legal dimension that seems most important.

Indeed, the closer one looks at the Second Amendment, the more significant its political ramifications seem. Its structure, for example, is oddly parallel to that of the larger Constitution, with a preamble (lines one and two) advancing a rationale of sorts and then a body, or gist (lines three and four), stating what is to be done. Other than the famous one beginning with "We the people," this is arguably the only such preamble in the entire document and certainly the only one in the Bill of Rights. The logical parallels are also curious. The larger Constitution opens by declaring that the people have unlimited power to alter their political circumstances so as to "promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." It seems that "we the people" can do whatever we want to improve our situation, including tossing out one constitution (the Articles of Confederation) and ordaining a new one. But the body of the Constitution goes on to say something completely different by declaring in Article V that a supposedly sovereign people is decidedly unsovereign when it comes to modifying the plan of government made in its name. (With just thirteen states representing as little as 5 percent of the US population able to veto any amend-

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ment, the US Constitution is among the hardest to change on earth.) By the same token, the mini-constitution that is the Second Amendment opens by declaring a people in arms to be the ultimate guarantor of freedom, but then it goes on to say that the people's government lacks the freedom to alter individual gun rights. Since the 1930s liberals have succeeded in circumventing the first restriction via the miracle of judicial interpretation, a modern form of transubstantiation that allows them to alter the essence of the Constitution without changing so much as a comma. But a return to an individual-rights reading of the Second Amendment would mean a rollback of free-form judicial review. By returning the amendment to its original meaning, such a reading couldn't help but strengthen the old civic-republican view of an expansive state as a threat to liberty.

This is profoundly reactionary and profoundly confusing. Are the people sovereign or not? Are they the protectors of liberty or a threat? The answer, according to the Big-C and little-c constitution, is both. Although legal academics like to think of the Constitution as a model of reason and balance, the Second Amendment puts us in touch with the document's inner schizophrenic—and, consequently, our own. Thanks to it, we the people know that the people are dangerous. Therefore, we must take up arms against our own authority. We are perennially at war with ourselves and are never more alarmed than when confronted by our own power. The people are tyrannized by the fear of popular tyranny.

Richard Feldman's *Ricochet*, an insider account of how conservatives have used the Second Amendment to clobber liberals on gun control and more, is evidence of what this schizophrenia means on the most down-to-earth political level. *Ricochet* is long—too long—on details about the inner workings of the NRA, the purges, the plots and the Machiavellian maneuvers of executive vice president Wayne LaPierre. Still, it has its moments. The most relevant concerns a campaign Feldman helped engineer in New Jersey in July 1990 to punish then-Governor Tom Florio, a Democrat, for pushing through a ban on assault weapons a few months earlier. When Florio announced a major tax increase to plug a deficit in the state budget, a Pat Buchanan–style "pitchfork rebellion"—led by a letter carrier named John Budzash and a title searcher named Pat Ralston—erupted across the middle of the state. Feldman, eager for revenge and experienced as a field operative when it came to populist campaigns of this type, sprang into action. Working behind the

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scenes, he established contact with Hands Across New Jersey, as the tax protesters called themselves, funneling them money, advising on strategy and grooming their press releases. "But unlike what I'd helped produce for the NRA, we had to give the Hands documents a rough edge," he recalls. "I always made sure to misspell at least one word, 'frivilous' or 'wastefull.'" The group's biggest PR coup was distributing thousands of rolls of "Flush Florio" toilet paper to protest the governor's proposal to slap a 7 percent sales tax on such items, a tactic that frightened the state's Democratic establishment to the core. Senator Bill Bradley did his best to duck the controversy but barely squeaked through to re-election, while Florio lost to Republican Christine Todd Whitman three years later. It was an example of the sort of right-wing populism that would continue to build throughout the 1990s, crippling the Clinton Administration and paving the way for the Bush/Cheney coup d'état in December 2000.

Hands Across New Jersey could not have done it without the NRA, and the NRA could not have done it without the Second Amendment. On the surface, tax hikes and gun control would seem to have as little to do with each other as horticulture and professional wrestling. But eighteenth-century civic republicanism, the ideology bound up with an individualist reading of the Second Amendment, provided the necessary link by portraying both as the products of overweening government. In the face of such "tyranny," the message to protesters was plain: take down those muskets, so to speak, and sally forth to meet the redcoats. Don't think, don't analyze, don't engage in any of the other sober measures needed to sort out the fiscal mess. Just turn the clock back to the eighteenth century, pack your musket with "Flush Florio" wadding and fire away! Needless to say, atavistic protests like these were sadly irrelevant in terms of the financial pressures that, in a politically fragmented, traffic-bound state like New Jersey, were growing ever more acute. Yes, the protesters succeeded in throwing out some bums (and ushering in even worse ones). But with the current governor, Democrat Jon Corzine, now struggling to resolve a 10 percent budget gap, the crisis has only deepened.

After the disaster of the Bush years, it would seem that the right-wing populism embodied by Hands Across New Jersey has burned itself out. But given the collapse of the liberal-collectivist reading of the Second Amendment and the Supreme Court's likely embrace of an individual right, it could conceivably gain a new lease on life—just as the country is grappling with a major recession, the worst housing crisis since the 1930s and a wave of municipal bankruptcies, all problems that call for a collective government response. But an incoherent Constitution dating from the days of the French monarchy, the Venetian republic and the Holy Roman Empire is now sending an increasingly strong message that firm and concerted action of this sort is the very definition of tyranny and must be resisted to the hilt. Once again, Americans must take aim—at themselves! Tushnet's question concerning "how we understand ourselves as Americans" thus becomes somewhat easier to answer: Americans are people at the mercy of eighteenth-century attitudes they don't know how to escape. ■

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Hans-Peter Feldmann's *9/12 Front Page*, 2001

Every Photo an Archive

by SUSIE LINFIELD

The title of the International Center of Photography's "Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art" is, *pace* Derrida, somewhat of a cheat and bespeaks a certain anxiety about the premise of the show itself. An archive is, my Webster's tells me, a "place in which public records or historic documents are kept." As the show's introductory wall text admits, the term "evokes a dim, musty" locale. In contrast, a fever (Webster's, again) is an "excessive excitement of the passions in consequence of strong emotion." It's as if the curator, Okwui Enwezor, felt the need, from the start, to sex up what he feared might be a less-than-enticing project.

He needn't have worried. "Archive Fever" (on view through May 4) is a rambling, sometimes irritating, essentially incoherent show, and one in which the sum is decidedly less than its parts. It does not come to any sustained conclusions—or even introduce a sustained set of questions—about photography's relationship to archival documents. But the exhibit's individual elements are, often enough, moving, thought-provoking, unsettling—and even sometimes fascinating. "Archive Fever" is vastly imperfect yet well worth seeing.

The show encompasses an array of forms including installations, films, videos, silkscreens and photographs that range from high-art to documentary. (Surprisingly, though, there is nothing from the Internet, which is really one huge archive.) But what struck me, and surprised me, most about the show is its prevailing obsession: which is, quite simply, violence. Missing children, the Holocaust, gunshot victims, terrorism, jihadism, civil war: these are not the show's only themes, but they constitute, at least to this viewer, its critical mass. One can't come away from this show without concluding that we are, indeed, cursed to be living in interesting times.

Susie Linfield directs the Cultural Reporting and Criticism program at New York University.

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Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that the show often weakens when it strays from news and history. Take, for instance, the twenty-two prints of Sherrie Levine's "appropriations" (that is, copies) of Walker Evans's Farm Security Administration photos. It may be, as Enwezor claims, that these photos, produced in 1981, were a "daring, seminal deconstruction of the modernist myths of originality." But the point has been made, over and again, and the imagery—or, rather, Levine's message—doesn't have much punch almost three decades later. (In contrast, Thomas Ruff's "Machines" C-prints—tinted, reworked photos from the brochure of a defunct German tool and machine company—are a true homage, though perhaps an unintended one, to Evans's sober photographs of farm implements.) In fact, Levine's work succeeds only in making me want to see a "real" Evans photo—though I realize that her triumph lies, precisely, in those quotation marks.

Another work of appropriation, Glenn Ligon's "Notes on the Margin of the Black Book" (1991–93), has drawbacks similar to Levine's. Taking up three whole walls, it consists of ninety-one photos in parallel double rows of sleek, muscular, sometimes naked black men that were originally shot by Robert Mapplethorpe; the photos are separated by short quotes from the likes of Roland Barthes, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Frantz Fanon, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and (surprisingly) Hilton Kramer. Gates argues that "race is the ultimate trope of difference," while Fanon informs us that "the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis." The problem here is immediately evident: these tendentious texts, though perhaps true, are powerless against the grace, eroticism and sheer impudence of Mapplethorpe's pictures. (Talk about punch!) It's hard to rob these images of their danger, their power and their brazen *lookability*; the words subvert the pictures as much as a mosquito subverts a lion. As the photography critic Vicki Goldberg once noted, "Any work of art that can be discussed primarily in terms of deconstruction will not have a strong political impact."

Other installations fare better. Zoe Leonard's "The Fae Richards Photo Archive" (1993–96) consists of eighty-two prints that tell the life story of a fictional black film actress. The mostly black-and-white photos, made in a consciously old-fashioned style, track Fae through her love affair with a woman and "document" her film career, which is thwarted by racism. (In a 1936 film called *Raising Cara*, "Richards played the uppity servant girl.") Though the targets here may be predictable, the installation, which includes everything from homely family photos to glamorous film stills, is made with flair, wit and an impressive attention to detail.

In a literal sense, of course, every photograph is an archive: from the moment of its inception, it records the past—or, at least, a glimpse of it. What makes the photos here specifically archival? Such questions are posed, though not answered, by the inclusion of British photographer Craigie Horsfield's huge, inky, black-and-white portrait of a young Polish couple named Magda and Leszek Mierwa, which was taken in Krakow in 1984. The Mierwas, surrounded by a jet-black background, sit upright, though comfortably, in their chairs. Leszek, a handsome bearded man, wears a T-shirt and bluejeans. His forearms are hairy; his hands (with wedding band visible) gently cross in his lap; his faint hint of a smile confirms rather than offsets the deep sense of melancholy that saturates this image. Magda wears a severe black dress; her shiny, dark hair flows to her waist; one delicate hand, illuminated, rests on her lap. She has dark, lovely, almost hooded eyes and wonderfully thick black eyebrows; she neither smiles nor frowns. The couple stares at us with such intensity, such forthrightness, such *purity*, that it's hard to look back.

A show like this would, of necessity, have to include Andy Warhol, whose art was so dependent on the reproduction and manipulation of documentary photographs. Enwezor chose *Race Riot*, a screenprint circa 1963 based on a Charles Moore photo essay from *Life* magazine. Though the city is not named, the place is clearly the Deep South, which was at that time still the Jim Crow South. The photo/screenprint, in black and white, shows an African-American demonstrator—neatly attired in a button-down shirt, shiny black shoes and a trim hat with a ribboned brim—being attacked by a police dog; a group of beefy white policemen, handcuffs and dogs in tow, surrounds him. In the background, a photographer in suit and tie shoots the scene. Screenprints are often used for political posters, and *Race Riot* reminds us of how the political movements, and the political violence, of the '60s seeped into popular culture and daily life. *Race Riot* makes us feel both bad and good: bad about the oppression of black Americans, good about what the civil rights movement fought for and accomplished. It is dated in the best of ways. Yet as with all Warhol's "political" work (I am thinking especially

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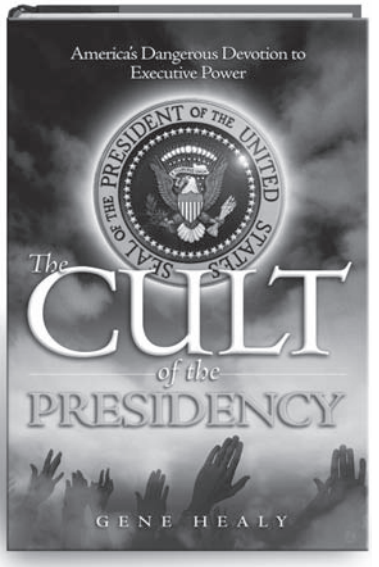

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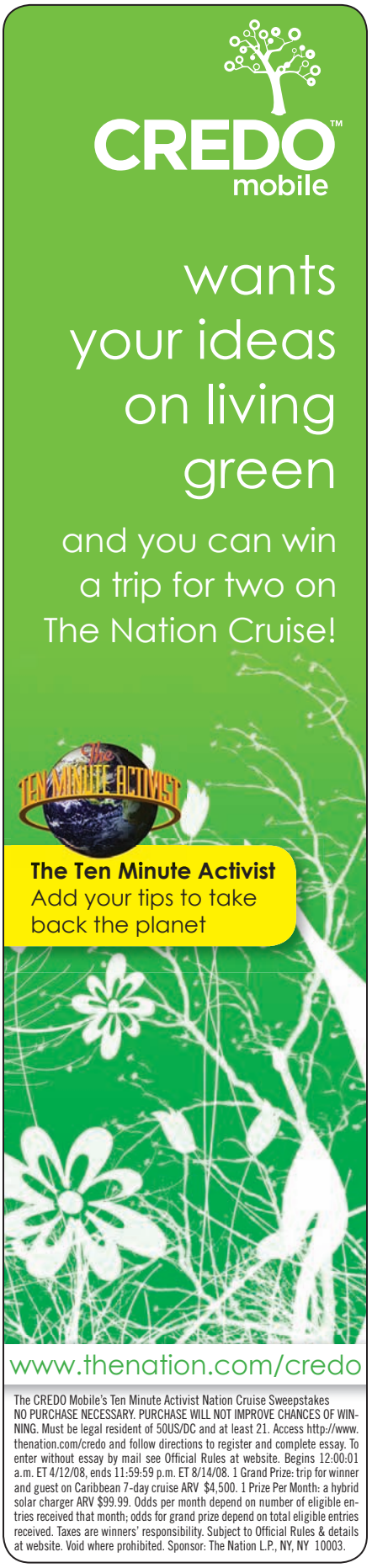
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of the electric-chair and the hammer-and-sickle paintings), there is a flippancy here—a propensity to see politics as, essentially, a manifestation of style—that makes me feel slightly queasy.

Ditto Robert Morris's *Untitled*, a silk-screen from 1987. It shows a naked female corpse—eyes and mouth half-open, hip-bone jutting out, crotch and breast exposed—and is based on a photo taken by the British Army when it liberated Bergen-Belsen. Morris has splashed the image with bluish and black tints and surrounded it with a large, carved black frame. So what? It's easy to see how using the Holocaust might add gravitas to Morris's work. But it's hard to see how his approach moves us even an inch closer to understanding or engaging such crimes.

Not exactly flippant, but equally superficial, is the museum's treatment of Israeli filmmaker Eyal Sivan's *The Specialist*, his 1999 documentary about the Eichmann trial that is based on courtroom footage. Displayed on a video screen smack in the middle of the exhibit, the film plays in a continuous loop, which means that most museumgoers, if they stop to see it at all, catch a glimpse of disembodied, probably nonsensical footage and snatches of conversation… and then move on. The Holocaust is transformed, almost literally, into random white noise: the Muzak of barbarism.

Fazal Sheikh's "Afghan Images" has the opposite fault: too much respect rather than too little. Sheikh is a Princeton-educated American (his father was Kenyan; his grandfather, Indian) who has photographed extensively in Africa and Afghanistan, especially among refugees. (Many of these photographs are collected in his books *A Sense of Common Ground* and *The Victor Weeps*.) Sheikh's images are often sepia-toned and composed with the solemnity of formal portraits; his subjects, though living through the most wretched histories, project a strikingly unassailable, albeit grief-stained, dignity. The four black-and-white photos included here were shot in Afghan refugee villages in northern Pakistan in 1997 and previously appeared in *The Victor Weeps*.

Each picture shows, in close-up, a creased, weathered hand holding the snapshot of a deceased loved one: three turbaned men with beards, one male child. We never see the holders of the snapshots: it is the departed, not the living, who matter. The "Afghan Images" are simple, sad and beautiful; and, presented as a set, they create a far deeper impression than each one could on its own.

But these images commemorating death are also highly disturbing, for they represent exultation rather than lament, at least in the eyes of their subjects. The commentary next to one photo quotes a man named Haji Abdul, whose father and five brothers died fighting the Soviets, on his losses. "It is a lucky family that offers the lives of their loved ones to the cause of Allah," Abdul says. "They have brought great blessings upon us." (On the day that I write this, a top Hamas commander whose son has just been killed by Israel expresses exactly the same thought to an Associated Press reporter.) In the accompanying wall text, Enwezor praises Sheikh for presenting us with "emblems of injustice, nobility, and martyrdom"—are the three synonymous?—and for the fact that the photographer "does not stand in judgment." Sheikh's empathy—and the decades-long suffering of the Afghans—are unquestionable, as is Sheikh's commitment to those he photographs. He's the opposite of a "parachute photojournalist," and there's no hint of exploitation in his work. Yet the lust for martyrdom, which has proved, everywhere, to be the lust for murder, seems precisely the sort of thing that should be judged—if not in 1997, then surely in 2008; ask the Iraqis, who virtually every day are blown to bits in mosques, marketplaces, schools and at funerals by the heaven-seekers. (For a radically different, and more intimate, take on the high cost of the culture of martyrdom, see Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*.)

It is hard to imagine the parents of the children in Ilán Lieberman's "Niño Perdido" (Lost Child; 2006–07) thanking God for their blessings. Lieberman, a Mexican artist, has created a quiet, chastening installation that consists of thirty tiny drawings based on photographs of missing—probably murdered—children, framed by simple off-white mattes and silver chrome frames. (The drawings are so small that the artist provides a magnifying glass.) Each portrait is accompanied by the child's name, height, hair or eye color, date and place of disappearance, and age (they range from 1 year to 17). Also supplied: "particular characteristics," which include "has language difficulties," "black mole on left leg" and "scar on right cheek, stutters." These children had histories, and their bodies did too. Some of the children smile; others look quite serious. None could have imagined their fates. The minuscule, delicate precision of these drawings—in such stark contrast to what must be the magnitude of the parents' wild, uncontrollable grief—is arresting.

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The romanticization of violence that emerges in Fazal Sheikh's work is not shared by Walid Raad, a Lebanese artist who lives in New York City. Raad's "We Can Make Rain But No One Came to Ask" (2008) explores his nation's fatal attraction to the car bomb. His installation consists of tiny slivers of photos of Beirut, some of which are based on those of Georges Semerdjian, a Lebanese newspaper photographer who specialized in documenting the decimation of his city during its long years of civil war (Semerdjian was killed on the job in 1990); others are altered versions of photos Raad has taken over the years. Raad includes "newsy" black-and-white shots of Lebanon as rubble along with sunny, weirdly cheerful color images of the wreckage. The pictures are so small that one strains to see them (no magnifying glass here), suggesting that Lebanon's auto-destruction has resulted in a kind of moral and political shrinkage.

"What happens in and to cities when residents, buildings, streets, and neighborhoods are exposed to the constant threat of assault?" Raad asks. And who, he wants to know, is behind these crimes: which militias, which armies, which individuals? Car bombs (in Beirut, they have numbered in the thousands) don't just kill lots of people and destroy lots of property; they deform, perhaps irreparably, the frangible social ecology of a city. Raad explains: "Semerdjian's photographs revealed how spatial and social distinctions between the private and the public, between the inside and the outside were yet another casualty of the car bomb crimes: the insides of bodies (stomach, flesh, and bone) on the outside of bodies; the contents of stores and buildings…now propelled onto the street; buildings without facades affording passersby unhindered views of private living rooms and bedrooms." And he warns that the omnipresent possibility of violence—the sine qua non of car-bomb culture—is of import not only to the Beirut of past and present but to the "London, Madrid, Baghdad, Gaza City and New York of today and possibly tomorrow." I hope he's wrong.

The stunner in this show is an installation that, on its surface, is so conceptually simple that it might have seemed a gimmick. German artist Hans-Peter Feldmann's "9/12 Front Page" (2001) takes up an entire room, set off from the rest of the exhibit. It displays the front pages of 100 newspapers from around the world as they appeared on September 12, 2001. Virtually every paper shows one or more shots, often in color, of the imploding towers, though some have ancillary photos too: a turbaned bin Laden, finger pointing in the air as he lectures; terrified New Yorkers fleeing the buildings and astonished, horrified ones who stand on the sidewalks and watch; cheering Palestinian children; a blank-faced George Bush. The languages, aside from the expected English, French, Spanish and German, include Chinese, Russian, Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew, Croatian, Portuguese, Dutch and Albanian. Here, then, is the twenty-first century's Internationale (though not quite the one Marx envisioned): a world united, if only for a day, in awe-struck fear.

An unsettled question among politicians and intellectuals, particularly on the left, is whether terrorism is a criminal act or a form of war. What is clear from "Front Page" is that the 9/11 attacks were perceived throughout the world as, precisely, acts of war against a sovereign nation, at least at the time. Guerre contre les USA, cries *Tribune de Genève*, a theme echoed by many others: A Declaration of War, says the British *Guardian*; La nouvelle guerre, reads *Le Figaro*; Krieg gegen die Zivilisation, says the *Rheinische Post*; while *La Stampa* describes the day as Attaco All'America. *As-Safir*, an Arabic political daily, takes a slightly different if no less dramatic approach: Apocalypse Now.

In contemporary usage, the phrase "it's history" is pejorative: it connotes something tired, irrelevant, *over*. Feldmann's installation connects us to history—and to its handmaiden, journalism—in the opposite way: as something we are forever living through, always struggling with, constantly surprised by and repeatedly unable to master. He connects us, too, to an understanding of history as a living process that we make, and share, with others (a concept that, alas, George W. Bush never grasped). "Front Page" can also be seen as a refutation of Susan Sontag's oft-quoted claim that repeated exposure to violent photographs anesthetizes us. On the contrary: viewing those towers of death is a deeper, and far worse, experience in 2008 than it was seven years ago, if only because now we know all the bad things that have happened since—and we can be sadly confident that there are more to come. The layers of grief have accumulated.

Sitting in Feldmann's installation, surrounded by the babel of languages, the inescapably terrible pictures, the screaming headlines, I felt humbled and shaken, but I didn't feel isolated, irrelevant or numb. In our time, and for the foreseeable future, perhaps that is what it means to be a citizen of the world. ■

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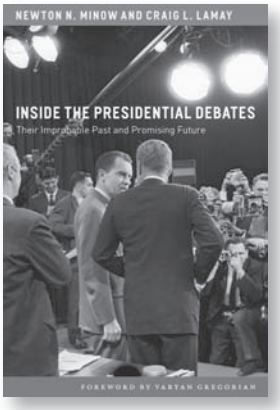
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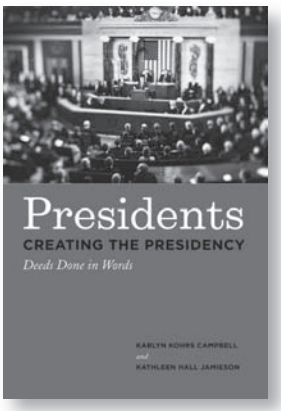

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Her Good Thing

by NATHANIEL FRIEDMAN

In an early scene of John Sayles's recently released *Honeydripper*, a blues singer performs in a nearly empty ramshackle club. She's hunched and careworn, but not without a certain regal quality. Accompanied sparely by piano and harmonica, her voice has a bottomless, meditative calm, even as she teases her man, asking him to choose her over booze. With the exception of a few low-key drunks, her audience consists of the club's anxious owner and a nattily dressed man, who looks upon her with reverence.

This is the Honeydripper saloon—source of the movie's title—and these are the hard times it's facing. The aging master, Bertha Mae, has become a commercial liability. Her old-timey style is still respected, but she no longer draws a crowd the way the blaring jukebox down the road does. The club she'd headlined is saved only when a mysterious, messianic young man plugs in his guitar and brings together electricity and human presence. On a modest scale, *Honeydripper* dramatizes the crucial moment in black pop when the music plugged in, got more insistently rhythmic and reflected a cultural shift toward an urban environment.

Like *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and *Buena Vista Social Club*, *Honeydripper* is more than a handsome film about musicians. It's an immensely appealing total package, one with serious crossover potential. The Honeydripper All-Stars have already hit the festival circuit to rave reviews; the band includes young ax-man Gary Clark Jr., Delta revivalist Keb' Mo', former Howlin' Wolf saxophonist Eddie Shaw, harpist Arthur Lee Williams and keyboardist Henderson Huggins (whose hands play those of Danny Glover's piano-playing club owner). It also features Dr. Mable John, the versatile vocalist who nails the part of Bertha Mae. Anyone who sees the film, or catches the All-Stars live, would assume that John—like her bandmates—is a veteran of the blues scene. But onscreen, John is acting more than reliving her past. She can belt out the blues on cue, but her unscripted place in history is as a forgotten trooper of the 1960s soul era, a vocalist who cut a Zelig-like path through an epoch while leaving some minor musical triumphs behind.

John was born in 1930, in Bastrop, Louisiana. Like so many African-Americans of her generation, she eventually found her way to a big city up North—in her case, Detroit. After high school she worked for an insurance agency run by the mother of future Motown mogul Berry Gordy. Her younger brother, Little Willie John—best known for the original version of "Fever"—was a star by the mid-'50s. Little Willie's smooth mix of exuberance and anguish is arguably the flashpoint of soul, the point at which R&B's raw timbre discovered soaring lyrical poignancy; it's hard to imagine Otis Redding or Marvin Gaye without Little Willie. While hardly the force of nature that her brother was, Mable could sound tough and coy in much the same way.

Although she logged the requisite hours with her church choir, John's musical career didn't begin in earnest until 1959, when

STAX MUSEUM, MEMPHIS

Mable John, mid-1960s

Nathaniel Friedman is the founder of the blog FreeDarko. His Macrophenomenal Pro Basketball Almanac *will be published in November by Bloomsbury USA.*

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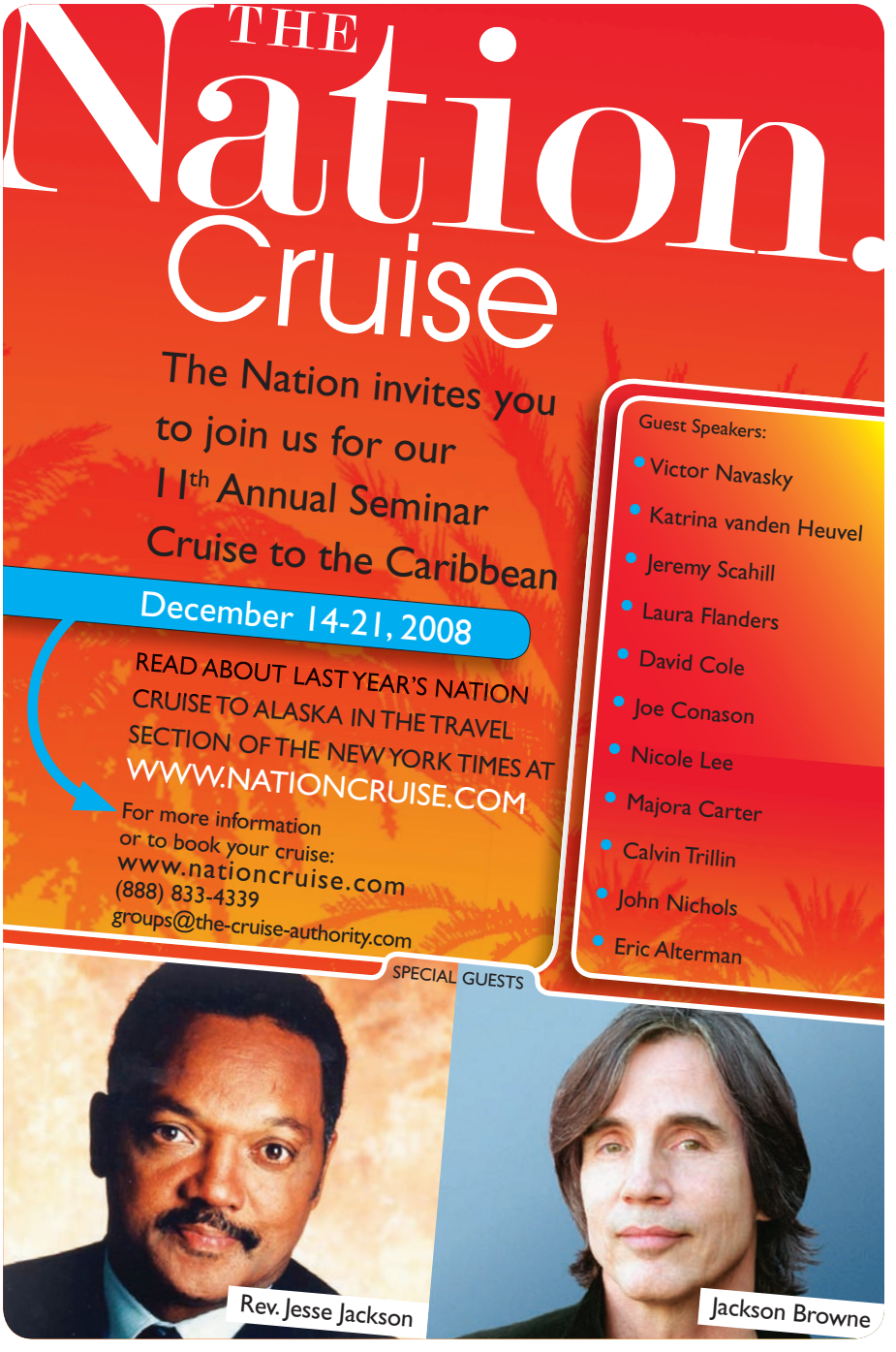
Gordy brought her into the studio for "Who Wouldn't Love a Man Like That." This track, recorded for the fledgling Tamla label, made her the first female artist to record for the Motown group. Released in 1960, "Who Wouldn't Love a Man Like That" had easy-swinging horns, hand claps and singalong appeal, as did follow-up tracks like "(I Guess There's) No Love" and "Actions Speak Louder Than Words." John found her way onto package shows with Jackie Wilson, her brother and Etta James. But compared with the shimmering harmonies and sculpted solos of vocal groups like the Marvelettes and the Supremes, John was just a little too robust. As she later put it, "I'm not a pop singer." She continued to record for Gordy until 1963. But all of her tracks stayed in the vaults except a 1963 remake of "Who Wouldn't Love a Man Like That."

John remained affiliated with Gordy, performing live until she asked to be released in 1964. In 1965, while living in Chicago, she hooked up with a new manager, local DJ Lucky Cordell, who was connected to Memphis's Stax Records. Unlike their rivals at Motown, the Stax brain trust believed that sharp pop instincts and a gritty, funky sensibility could happily coexist. The year John came aboard, the label released signature hits like Eddie Floyd's "Knock on Wood," Sam and Dave's "Hold On! I'm Comin'" and Otis Redding's "Try a Little Tenderness." A 1967 Stax Revue played to sold-out crowds in Europe and made the Stax musicians realize for the first time the universal appeal of their music. Motown had better sales, but Stax had the real feeling of a movement.

Released in 1966, "Your Good Thing (Is About to End)," John's first single for Stax, might be her finest three minutes. Her biggest hit, it broke into the top 100 on the pop charts and reached No. 6 on the R&B charts and would eventually be covered by Lou Rawls and Bonnie Raitt. Gutsy, peevish and weary, "Your Good Thing" is as unsettling as it is moving. With another singer, this minor-key Isaac Hayes/David Porter composition could sound like a dirge. But John, voice reedy atop a jumpy, out-of-tune piano and bed of moaning horns, has apprehension in her voice as she announces, "You don't have to love me when I want it/'Cause somebody else will." Then the rhythm section locks in, the piano vamps and the horns ooze disdain as John taunts her man with "your real good thing." The performance nails the mix of disgust, sadness and superiority so familiar to anyone who has ever been forced to abruptly end a relationship. "Your Good Thing" was based on events in John's life; she has said it "relieved the bitterness…like getting something off of my chest." Available on the mammoth Complete Stax/Volt Singles (or on iTunes), it's one of those gems that only appear minor if you aren't paying attention, and among soul buffs it's the crown jewel of John's reputation. It's also worth noting that the tune is worlds away from the voice of Bertha Mae. Bertha Mae tells a story with equal parts sass and sophistication; Mable John sounds like a character caught up in the midst of the action.

In 1967 John told her man "Don't Hit Me No More," a single that refuses to favor the victim or the badass. It opens with the strange lament, "I'm so sorry you had to slap me," veering dangerously close to the Crystals' "He Hit Me (and It Felt Like a Kiss)." Within seconds, though, John quips that this fit of jealousy at least shows that her man cares. The lyrics give us domestic violence with a context—that is, a relationship—and John's performance is accordingly varied and confused. She's not ordering her lover to back off or pleading for her life; her voice is alternately dismayed,



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pissed off, betrayed and depressed as she tries to make sense of what's happened. The rhythm section, all chattering guitar and loose shuffle, is the soundtrack to an ordinary life that knows it doesn't have the luxury of high drama.

It's John's straight style that's cemented her status as a favorite among collectors; the power of "Don't Hit Me No More" is the power of the familiar. But the year before, another female singer had come to Stax and recorded what may be the most devastating song in a catalog packed with them: Ruby Johnson's "I'll Run Your Hurt Away." Unlike the unique "Your Good Thing," this song follows a fairly standard Stax template. But Johnson's plangent cries turn it into a spine-tingling plea for love conquering misery. Isaac Hayes claims to have broken down in tears while composing it, and Johnson delivers it with bottomless sympathy and strength. It's the kind of thing I put on when all seems lost, but I can't seriously say I've ever found a moment of real life this sublime.

After John left Stax in 1968—overcome, some say, with depression following her brother Willie's death—she became the director of Ray Charles's backup group, the Raelettes. Then, after almost ten years of life with Charles, John left the business and turned toward the light. She launched the Joy in Jesus Ministries in the Los Angeles area, as well as a homeless outreach program that's still active. The "Dr." before her name in the credits of *Honeydripper* denotes the Doctor of Divinity degree she earned in 1993. John also put her vocal talents to good use on gospel numbers, such as on the self-released album *Where Can I Find Jesus?* Soul singers often turn to gospel, but they don't usually follow the third path John has taken: she has become a novelist, teaming up with music biographer David Ritz for a series about Albertina Merci, a blues singer turned evangelist. In the last two years, Random House subsidiary Harlem Moon has published *Sanctified Blues* and *Stay Out of the Kitchen! Love Tornado* follows this June, making two books in a row named after past tracks of hers. Like Sayles taking the Honeydripper All-Stars on the road, John knows what a valuable commodity credibility can be.

Pop music often tempts us with unattainable highs and lows of emotion—for a brief moment with Little Willie or Ruby Johnson, sound is bigger than life. But it's just as moving when it reflects what we know, telling it like it is as we nod our heads in agreement. Mable John's finest singles let listeners peek inside themselves, showing that the choir has every bit as much to say as the star. ■

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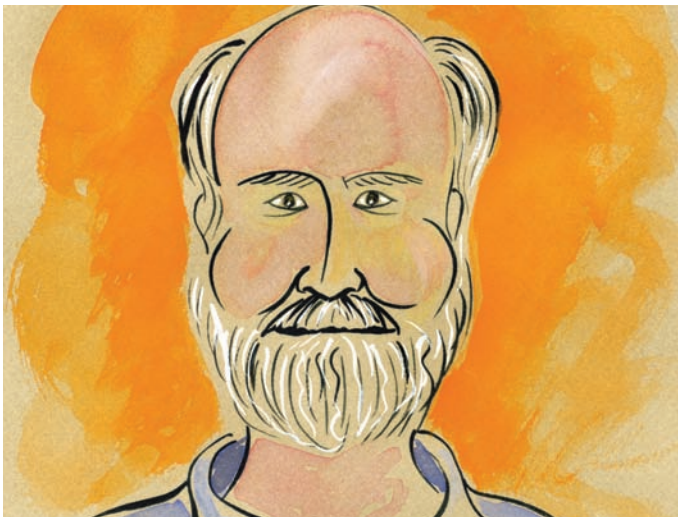

ADRIAN BELLESGUARD

Nicholson Baker

Nicholson Baker is known for fiction that takes a microscopic view of the everyday, bringing to life each wriggling ribosome of fleeting thought and mitochondrial human routine. This spring, he published *Human Smoke*, a 550-page "amateur history" of the run-up to World War II. (The book ends on December 31, 1941.) Researched from contemporary news accounts and historical sources and arranged as a series of brief episodes, the book gives voice to oft-ignored pacifists; it also "rescues" stories of ordinary people caught up in the terrible grinding gears of the march to war.

—Christine Smallwood

What was a typical working day like?

Well, the book kind of grew the way a strawberry plant grows. It starts with a little bunch of stuff happening over here—you get interested and look up what's in the newspaper, see what a diarist said, check a secondary source. And then some of the roots reach out and plant themselves into another place. I let the newspapers and diaries pull me in the direction that they wanted to go rather than start with the idea that I was going to tell some comprehensive history.

How did you decide what to include?

I included the things that struck me as strange or that seemed to reveal something obliquely. The book seems in some ways to contradict itself, and that's what real history does. And I used the things that I couldn't forget or that seemed very painful but part of the marginalized history of the war.

Did what you found change your thinking on the war?

Yeah, because I began the project thinking the kind of things that people think: war is generally not so good, but on the other hand, there are really bad people in the world. I think different things on different days, but the big surprise was the way that Britain resisted the Hitlerian menace—the deliberate choosing of a slow war, a war of attrition, a war of hunger and civilian bombings so early in the war. I didn't realize that there was such an effort to create fear, sleeplessness and disorientation in the German civil populace in 1940. And the notion that Churchill and Roosevelt are talking about whether they should have 20,000 four-engine bombers or 30,000, but they really don't want to allow Jews to come into their country. They just don't want it. The war was not fought for the Jews. It was fought for what? For British honor, for British Empire, you know, certain abstract ideas of liberty. There's a lot of heroism, but the surprise to me was how much the early part of the war was a continuation of the way the British Empire in its late phase thought of the whole world—that it could be controlled in this way from the air.

What did you leave out of the book?

It's up to you to rescue it! Let's see. I left out a good deal of what happened in Russia and what happened in France. And even in the draft that I had, when my wife read it, she reached her limit with bloodthirsty statements from Winston Churchill. She actually was in a kind of rage, and she said, "This page has to go!" She was so right. But I think that anybody who wrote a book like this would do it a different way. People used to have books rebound, and they would double in size, and they'd put a blank page between each page. And then they'd put in their own things. This book is all written using libraries. It's not using any secret sources, anything unpublished. Anybody who wants to go ahead and fill in pages between my pages or cross out my pages should, because I think that a war this important to the history of humanity needs lots of amateur historians.

Your previous book was *Checkpoint*, a dialogue about assassinating President Bush—another case of dangerous speech.

There's definitely a connection between the two books. But I also found with that book that fiction only gets you so far. I mean, if you try to tell a story, you try to say true things with a parable, you let the reader off the hook sometimes. Even with, say, *Catch-22*, which is way above anything I'm ever gonna do, it's so funny and strange that you sort of say, Oh, that's interesting that the war was bad, but this is such a funny, strange book! So with *Human Smoke*, I wanted it to be one thing: this thing happened and then this thing happened and this thing.

I was going to ask how you would assassinate Bush, but you've made it clear that that's not where you're at.

I really wouldn't, I really wouldn't, I honestly would not! I think it's a really, really, really, really bad idea to kill anybody! I mean, I removed my own personality and overt opinionizing from *Human Smoke*, but I don't want to hide it now. If you really wanted to know what I believe? More or less I'm a Quaker-allied pacifist kind of guy. Which means that you would never, even if it's crystal clear that a person is a really, really bad person—you want the rule of law to prevail, you want people to be punished for things that they've done but not to be killed for things that they've done. That's true for Presidents and that's true for horrible dictators and everyone in between. ■

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